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**THE**  
**EMPLOYMENT OF GENTLEWOMEN**



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**EMPLOYMENT OF GENTLEWOMEN**



# IRRESPONSIBLE PHILANTHROPISTS

BEING SOME CHAPTERS ON THE

## EMPLOYMENT OF GENTLEWOMEN

BY

E. GENNA

TELEGON SCHOOL FOUNDER

'Tais-toi, Jean Jacques, car on ne l'entend pas'



LONDON

C. KEGAN PAUL & CO., 1 PATERNOSTER SQUARE

1881

232. q. 392.



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## PREFACE.

IN OFFERING this small volume to the public consideration, I should in justice add to the *nom de guerre* appearing on the title-page that of the lady who, as sub-manager of the Telegon School, has done me and the School such valuable service, and who has been my co-worker throughout these pages.

Nor should I let the occasion pass without a word of recognition of the other ladies who, holding responsible positions in the School, have given ungrudging care to its prosperity.

TELEGON SCHOOL OF NEEDLEWORK:  
2 Vere Street.



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# IRRESPONSIBLE PHILANTHROPISTS.



## CHAPTER I.

‘If there be one note sooner than another to which conscience awakes in these times, it is to the cry of unserved humanity.’ Words written half a century ago, but which, with the lapse of years and to a new generation, have gained rather than lost in applicability. And indeed the cynic historian of the twentieth century may possibly be found writing of this Victorian period:—‘There was now an attempted revival of many old customs and of many old rituals. Patches and powder were tried, but with partial success. Yet an old ritual, even as old as the Christian era, had an amazing spread; and the whole fashionable world were seen helping their neighbour, binding up his wounds and putting twopence in his purse, even though they loved-him not.’

But this writer and the cynic historian should have little in common, and it might concern us not so much to hear of the people he would satirize as of a certain company of the rank and file of real

fighting men and women in the great army of English beneficence which has volunteered to occupy a difficult outpost, where there is much very thankless work to be done, and small space for the merely summer-day philanthropist. And if these chapters tend to be a recital of how the writer herself mastered the goose-step and passed out of the awkward squad, it is because she knows no better way of giving her fellows the benefit of such experience as she has gained through her many mistakes.

The self-authorised commission of this company of workers ran that they were to foster self-help amongst necessitous gentlewomen—to this end assisting such to training and employment.

What was their first practical step? They drew together in small groups, as personal acquaintance or individual influence, stimulated by the common desire, led them; and they constituted themselves into various societies, the name of each one of which bore some impress of the founder's original aims:—The Gentlewomen's Self-help Institute; The Work Society; The Ladies' Industrial Society, &c. So far their way had been easy; public money had flowed in freely—for the work societies may have had to complain of the apathy of the public, but they have never had the right to complain of the shortness of its gifts measured by pounds, shillings, and pence—few charitable bodies in England have the right so to complain.

In 1874 the Gentlewomen's Self-help Institute received 625*l.* 2*s.* 8*d.* of public money. I have not

the report by me for 1875. In 1876 it received 836*l.* 1*s.* 11*d.*; in 1877, 447*l.* 18*s.*; in 1878, 522*l.* 5*s.* This ought to have been a plethora of riches to a society whose function was the fostering of self-help, and not the giving of doles. Of this more hereafter. Meanwhile we have to see the societies beginning to feel their responsibilities heavy on them; beginning, in short, to realise in themselves the position of the constitution-mongers of the Continent, who having built their edifice, found it suited none of its intended inhabitants, and that therefore its intended inhabitants must be made to suit it.

In 1871 the then New Society for the Sale of Ladies' Work, North Audley Street (now the Ladies' Work Society, 31 Sloane Street), in its prospectus stated that, 'This Society is established as an encouragement to industry, a means of extending the charities of the benevolent by turning their abilities to account; and as a help to the needy. Nothing inquisitorial respecting the object for working being allowed, it is hoped that a class of sufferers may be reached of whom the world knows little—shrinking from an exposure of their poverty, yet thankfully accepting such an opportunity of providing for their several wants. Orders for work will be thankfully received and carefully executed by ladies who are silently struggling to gain a livelihood, and who may thus, without publicity, obtain the means of subsistence.'

In 1879 the society has made a great gain in directness when it states that it 'has been founded



to provide employment for gentlewomen whose circumstances render it necessary that they should employ their time remuneratively. The objects of the society are:—first, to benefit the workers; secondly, to raise the standard of needlework.’

The Ladies’ Industrial Society, 11 Lower Porchester Street, states that, ‘The object of this society is to afford to needy gentlewomen the means of disposing of their work.’

The Gentlewomen’s Self-help Institute, by far the largest recipient of public charity, demands of an applicant for a share in this charity, that she shall be ‘a lady by birth, of good reputation, and necessitous,’ having letters of recommendation testifying to the same. In its last prospectus it states that, ‘The promoters of this institution seek to place within the reach of educated ladies, who may have been reduced from easy circumstances to narrow means, an opportunity of turning their natural or acquired abilities to account. There are, unhappily, numerous cases in which ladies—widows or daughters of clergymen, barristers, military or naval officers, and professional men, gently and carefully nurtured, suddenly find themselves, by the death of their natural protectors, reduced to destitution. To no other class can such a condition be more terrible—none can, from previous circumstances, be generally more helpless—and at the same time, none can shrink more sensitively from the slights and miseries that attend poverty and dependence. It is in the hope of placing means of “Self-help” within the reach of this class that this institution has been established.’

As a matter of fact, the methods adopted by the societies scarcely so much as touch the necessities here so sympathetically described ; the training given by them is of small technical value ; the employment given is of very slightly higher value. In short, the need the originators of the Work Societies saw, and with such sincere compassion that they could no longer rest without seeking to meet it, has hitherto shown itself most unaccommodating to any such projects as those we are discussing.


Some eleven years ago, the present writer commenced an experiment in the same direction, but happening to adopt different methods, and setting herself more precise aims, she has fallen on better fortune. Many ladies, not a few of them members of the committees of work societies, others outsiders, yet deeply interested in the employment of gentlewomen, have at different times during the last few years solicited her to pass on the benefit of her experience to them and the work societies generally. Some of these have spoken as though she possessed some specific against failure which could be administered in small but potent doses to any one desiring it. When she has disowned the knowledge of any other specific than hard work, on proved principles, with such diversities as each individual can only learn for herself, her Jordan has seemed to them small beside their Abana and Pharpar ; and it has even been deprecatingly hinted that she ought not to desire to keep a monopoly of her experience.

She has therefore decided to record in detail her

ideas of what the work societies should do, and what they should not do, with such information as to the working of her own undertaking as may throw light on the general question. If she has not done this earlier, it is because she has until now felt that she has not known her own subject well enough, and assuredly from no niggardliness.

As a preliminary, it will be necessary to ascertain the present position of the work societies, and what they can effect as at present constituted; and the best possible witnesses to this are provided us in the balance-sheets of the societies themselves. These we are now to analyse.

We take the report of the Gentlemen's Self-help Institute for 1877, with its balance-sheet for the year ending December 1876, its seventh annual report, drawn up therefore with seven years' experience of the work. In this year the committee informed their subscribers that 'they specially invite the co-operation of all who are interested in improving the condition, and as far as possible alleviating the distress that exists among such ladies as constitute the working members of this society. Reduced from ease, and perhaps from affluence to poverty; broken in health and spirits; they nobly seek to maintain themselves by their own exertions. To them the bread won by the industry of their own hands is sweeter than that obtained by dependence on others. On their behalf the committee once more appeal for liberal support to carry on the useful work of the society.'



In this year the subscriptions and donations amounted to 664*l.* 10*s.* 6*d.* The net receipts of a concert were 171*l.* 7*s.* 7*d.* Here we have a total receipt of 835*l.* 18*s.* 1*d.* alms-money in the year. There were other receipts amounting to 56*l.* 16*s.* 9*d.*; but as these do not seem to have been of an eleemosynary character they do not concern us. The 835*l.* 18*s.* 1*d.* itself has, moreover, to be reduced before we can deal with it. In the beginning of the year the treasurer held a balance of 2*l.* 4*s.* 8*d.* only; at the close of the year he held 83*l.* 15*s.* 0½*d.* The difference between these two sums—namely, 81*l.* 10*s.* 4½*d.*—has to be deducted from the 835*l.* 18*s.* 1*d.*; leaving 754*l.* 7*s.* 8½*d.* alms-money actually absorbed in one twelvemonth in the working of this ‘Self-help’ institute.

We go on to the report for 1878 with its balance-sheet for the year ending December 1877. The society starts with a balance in its favour of 83*l.* 14*s.* 0½*d.* Donations and subscriptions supply 447*l.* 18*s.* There are two items amounting to 15*l.* 6*s.* 6*d.* not eleemosynary, and therefore outside our present purpose; and as there were no proceeds of an entertainment to record this year, we have here a sum of 531*l.* 12*s.* 0½*d.* only. But the society obtained and spent an advance from its treasurer of 226*l.* 15*s.* 3½*d.* Consequently the alms-money, actual or prospective, absorbed in this twelvemonth in the working of this ‘Self-help’ institute reaches a total of 758*l.* 7*s.* 4*d.*

Yet the whole force of these figures is not made evident until the results to the working members during the year are found and examined into. The working members were then (as they are still) about 330 in number. During the year 1877 the sums paid over to them amounted to 1,291*l.* 13*s.* 10*d.* The task before us is to look into the composition of these sums. Of the total given above 798*l.* 4*s.* 1½*d.* was by work to order. With work to order the rule of the society is to supply materials; but there are necessary exceptions to this rule of a kind which will readily occur to us—cotton in the case of crochet; wood in fretwork; paints and cardboard in sketches and birthday cards. Also the materials for many small special orders it will be most convenient, and generally most economical, for the worker herself to supply. Their cost must be deducted from our figures before we arrive, as is our present aim, at the actual wages received by the working members for their labour during the year. This cost is not an easily ascertainable sum, but we shall be, I think, far within the mark if we deduct for it 48*l.* 4*s.* 1½*d.*, and thus bring the amount we are dealing with down to 750*l.*, where we leave it for the present, whilst we pass on to another point.

The sums received by the working members in the year amounted to 1,291*l.* 13*s.* 10*d.* Of these 798*l.* 4*s.* 1½*d.* was by work to order; but 463*l.* 9*s.* 8½*d.* was made up by sales—sales, that is, from the considerable amount of stock selected, paid for, and worked up by the working members on their own

responsibility, and kept by them at their own risk at the society's depôt.

Confining ourselves for the present to the cost to the working members of the articles sold for them ; ignoring, that is, until later the cost to them of the much larger mass of their unsold stock ; we cannot, on the most moderate estimate, put their expenditure on material and carriage at less than one-third of the price of the goods sold. This one-third expenditure, therefore, compels us to deduct a sum of 154*l.* 9*s.* 11*d.* from the original sum of 463*l.* 9*s.* 8½*d.*, leaving us 308*l.* 19*s.* 9½*d.* to add to that sum of 750*l.* which we had previously dealt with in a similar manner. In short, we find ourselves, in our search after the actual wages fund of the society, left with only 1,058*l.* 19*s.* 9½*d.* of that original sum of 1,291*l.* 13*s.* 10*d.* given in the report.

But the figures cannot be allowed to rest even here. Rule IV. of the society with great propriety decides that, 'in all correspondence a stamped and directed envelope must be enclosed for reply.' This entails a charge of twopence on the worker, besides paper and envelopes, for every letter she writes respecting her work.

What with acknowledgments of the receipt of money, necessary inquiries as to the work, and unnecessary inquiries as to the same—and every one who has had any experience in the employment of gentlewomen knows that these last will be not a few—less than an average of twelve letters to each working member in the twelve months cannot be

conceded. This average, with the twelve stamps for reply, entails a postage charge on the nominal wages fund of two shillings per head, which with 330 working members amounts to 33*l.* This 33*l.* deducted from the 1,058*l.* 19*s.* 9½*d.* leaves us with 1,025*l.* 19*s.* 9¼*d.* as the actual wages fund of the society.

But though the actual wages fund may on the highest estimate reach this sum, it must be even more largely reduced before it represents the actual amount by which the pockets of the working members benefited during the year, through the action of their institute.

It will be remembered that, of the sums received by them, 463*l.* 9*s.* 8½*d.* was spoken of in the report as made up by sales, which were further defined to be sales from the considerable amount of stock selected, paid for, and worked up by the working members on their own responsibility, and kept by them at their own risk at the society's depôt. It seems to have occurred to no one that this item simply concealed, stood in front of, as it were, a direct loss sustained in each year by the workers. It seems to have occurred to no one to keep a stock-book, wherein should be entered every article contributed to this stock in the course of each year, whether sold, withdrawn, or remaining at the depôt. Such a book would have told its own tale, and must surely have been utterly destructive of this branch of the work. In face of its non-existence we must press into our service such data as we do possess.

## *The Net Cash Results.*

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After careful inquiry and calculation, it appears the average amount of the stock supplied by the 330 working members in the year cannot be put at a lower sum than 3*l.* 10*s.* a head, taking it at its priced value. Five pounds a head would, I think, be nearer the true state of affairs; but adopting the more moderate figure, we have a sum of 1,155*l.* to deal with. Taking the equally moderate estimate of one-third as the expenditure on material and carriage, we find the working members would have paid in hard cash 385*l.* merely in order to get this 1,155*l.* of goods on the market of the institute. They would also have expended many weeks of labour on the production of these goods; but of that, though it could undoubtedly be put in figures, we do not here speak.

The fact with which we have here to do is, that in finding the net cash results per head in the year to the working members, we can no longer ignore the mass of unsold stock. A one-third deduction from the sales only will not suffice us; the deduction must be not simply on the 463*l.* 9*s.* 8½*d.* of sales; but on the whole workers' stock of 1,155*l.* It must be a deduction not of 154*l.* 9*s.* 11*d.*, but of 385*l.* It follows that the net cash results to the 330 working members in the year are not even 1,025*l.* 19*s.* 9½*d.*, but 795*l.* 9*s.* 8½*d.*, that is 2*l.* 8*s.* 2½*d.* per head, or, to put it into different juxtaposition, only 37*l.* 2*s.* 4½*d.* more than the 758*l.* 7*s.* 4*d.* alms-money expended on its production. 37*l.* 2*s.* 4½*d.* is then the money expression of the amount of self-help this 'Self-help'



institute succeeded in bringing into life in the course of one year of its work.

The work of the Gentlewomen's Self-help Institute was also unsuccessful from another side than that of poverty of result; it was unsuccessful from the side of irregularity. The evil effect of doles is aggravated when these encourage a growing faith in them through their regularity. The good effect of wages is dissipated, when these defeat dependence on them through their irregularity. This is so positive an axiom in the labour market, that it governs prices in an important degree.

The working members of the Institute might on an average receive 2*l.* 8*s.* 2½*d.* per head for their labour; but, insignificant though this sum be, each one was subject as to her share in it to the full caprice of the law of averages in its action on the individual. No one could tell how much she would have sold for her, nor when it would be sold: therefore no dependence could be placed on proceeds from such a source as aid towards subsistence, let what labour might be put into the work.

On the showing of the committee their working members are terribly poor. They were, said the report, to taste the sweetness of bread earned by the work of their own hands, guided to this by the society. Now there is a very homely but a very wise East Anglian proverb, 'A short spoon to a starving man.' The spoon of the Gentlewomen's Self-help Institute seems to be a very long one, and with very little food in it at the most.

After writing the above, I received, through the courtesy of the Secretary, the Report of the Institute for 1879, with its balance-sheet for the year ending December 1878. I may state here, that it was necessary to commence and close the inquiry into the balance-sheets of the societies at a definite period previous to the writing of these chapters, which are in much based on the figures obtained therefrom. The balance-sheet of the Gentlemen's Self-help Institute for the year ending December 1879 is not in my possession. That for the year ending December 1880 is not yet published. But I have reason to believe these later balance-sheets will only more strikingly confirm my deductions.

Submitting the balance-sheet for the year ending December 1878 to analysis, I find, in brief, alms-money, actual or prospective, absorbed in the year to the amount of 547*l.* 1*s.* 2*d.* The net cash results in the year to the 330 working members I find to be 426*l.* 10*s.* 6*d.*, that is, 1*l.* 5*s.* 10½*d.* a head, or, to put it into different juxtaposition, less by 120*l.* 10*s.* 8*d.* than the alms-money expended on its production and introduction. So that in this year the society has succeeded in solving the problem how to handle the labour of 330 people so as to lose for it all marketable value whatever, and indeed to make it costly by the sum of 120*l.* 10*s.* 8*d.*

This analysis of figures may seem relentless, but the spirit of independence should not be less admirable in one class than in another, and that spirit must be greatly shaken in the minds of many poor gentle-

women by the insufficient results of this so-called experiment in self-help. The present contention is, that though the axioms of self-help abound in the report, the action of the society is merely covert almsgiving, and that we have here no genuine experiment in self-help—and hence, it is argued, the very smallness of the money results to the workers.

## CHAPTER II.


THE Gentlemen's Self-help Institute has for its main object aid to the independent subsistence of its working members: its balance-sheet and report have therefore been looked to principally in search of the measure of its success or failure to provide this. We now come to a society which in one department has training for its more immediate aim—The Ladies' Dressmaking and Embroidery Association, 42 Somerset Street.

In 1875 appeared the prospectus of the society, and in this prospectus the eight ladies acting as its promoters advise the issue of 10*l.* shares, on which interest would be paid, as the preliminary step in its formation. To one who has never varied from her opinion, formed in the very outset of what is known as the self-help movement, that invested capital on which interest should be paid is the only sound basis to rest either a work society or a technical school on, this appeared promising. Somewhat of unpracticability there was about the prospectus; but the paramount obligation to keep the capital intact might be expected to eliminate much of this. The attrition of a sound economic law might rub off some of

the glitter, but it would only strengthen all there was of solid substance in the project.

I lost sight of the society for several months. When it re-emerged to my view it had no more to say about invested capital; it was in the full swing of soliciting alms; old furniture was being begged, subscriptions to pay the rent were being asked for, in short the project had suffered grievous declension from the stand-point of its first prospectus.

It is to be believed that the committee were disappointed that this was so. It appears that the hope of making the association self-supporting clung to them even as late as the year 1878. But they have themselves since announced the death of that hope. It is said to be 'improbable that a training institution of this kind, dealing with this class of pupil, should ever be quite self-supporting.' It is urged that 'it is obvious that an enterprise of a mercantile nature, in which the interests of the speculation itself are subordinate to those of its workers, must be at a great disadvantage. Other establishments can pick their hands and dismiss incapables; the essence of a training school is to sacrifice itself to its workers, and to do the best it can with whatever material it has in hand.' And finally, in the concluding paragraph of the report issued in the spring of 1879, the committee turn round and boldly ask that, 'in urging the claims of the institution (the only one of its kind in London) upon the public, and asking for means to carry on its work, it should be remembered that the training given to



the apprentices is quite gratuitous, and that the work of the pupils until they have received a certain amount of instruction is quite unremunerative.'

On reading this, one's first impulse was to doubt whether the good law of self-support were applicable to a technical school. What authorities could one go to on the subject? It happens that in the *Woman's Gazette* for January 1879 and the following months, there appeared (introduced by words of strong commendation from the editor) a reprint of a paper from Mr. Edward Watherston, on 'The Industrial Employment of Women in France compared with England,' contributed by him to the Social Science Congress held at Cheltenham in 1878.

Speaking of the 'Société pour l'Instruction professionnelle des Femmes,' the mother society of hundreds of institutions of a similar character now existing in France, he says that it started on a capital of fifty pounds; a school being opened under the superintendence of a lady in a small house in the Rue de la Perle, Paris, on October 5, 1862. 'The school commenced with only five pupils. . . . It had been laid down as the basis of the whole system that all pupils should pay for their instruction, the sum fixed being eight francs, or six-and-eightpence per month, and a short practical working of the institution in the Rue de la Perle showed that its whole success rested upon the enforcement of this rule, and the rigid exclusion of all mere charity-giving. At the end of the first year the school was found to be self-supporting, and at the end of the second it had

grown to such dimensions that it had to seek larger quarters.' I mark that the fourth class in this self-supporting school, with its hundreds of pupils, was called *Atelier de confection*, and gave practical teaching in millinery, dressmaking, and all kinds of needlework.

So much for a particular example of a self-supporting technical school of dressmaking. At the conclusion of a long paper, full of statistics, Mr. Watherston generalises thus: 'There can be no doubt that the carrying out of this tenet' (that an employer's interests are likewise those of his hands) 'has largely contributed to the success of many French industries. It has certainly had much to do also with the progress in the industrial employment of women made in France. It is an axiom that can never be too often repeated, trite as it may be, that charity, however wisely it may be administered, is helpless in seeking to help others' (i.e. in matters to do with employment).

Mr. Watherston goes on to say that this, apparently, is better understood by our French neighbours than by ourselves, and hence their success in the field. He considers we 'must follow, if we are to succeed, on the path they have opened, indicated clearly by a few landmarks'—two of which we give here. 'Firstly, establishment of special training schools for certain trades, following a preliminary general education. Secondly, these training schools, if started by subscription, must be made self-supporting within a short time, or else closed as un-

successful. All pupils must pay a moderate fee for being taught.'

Mr. Watherston has given us somewhat of the statistical history of the 'Société pour l'Instruction professionnelle des Femmes'—let us turn to the Report of the Ladies' Dressmaking and Embroidery Association for the lesson of its statistical history.

We have, besides the report, a mass of information in an article appearing in the *Woman's Gazette* for August 1878, written with the view of gaining over more subscribers to the Association. It will be less tedious to the reader, and no wrong will be done the Association, if I confine our more detailed analysis of figures to the report for the year ending December 1878; the last complete report, that is, to come into my hands at the moment of my entrance on these investigations. The Association came into life August 1875; consequently in December 1878 it was in the fourth year of its existence. In 1877 it consumed the sum of 213*l.* 13*s.* 8*d.* to be supplied by charitable persons, including an old balance standing in its favour of 32*l.* 15*s.* 5*d.* During 1878 it consumed the sum of 222*l.* 15*s.* 2½*d.* to be supplied by charitable persons, including a sum of 63*l.* 18*s.* 2½*d.* by which it increased the balance standing against it at the beginning of the year. Therefore the principle of self-help had lost ground with it, not only on the point of hope, but also in the matter of money.

The Association has two separate departments, dressmaking and embroidery—keeping separate books so far as their immediate work is concerned. The



expenditure in the Embroidery Department is entered under the three heads of Salary to Superintendent, Wages to Workers, and Material, making a total of 507*l.* 12*s.* 11*d.* The receipts are entered in the one sum of 524*l.* 8*s.* 0½*d.*, giving an apparent surplus of 16*l.* 15*s.* 1½*d.* In the Dressmaking Department the expenditure is entered under two heads only: Salaries and Materials—forming a total of 476*l.* 10*s.* 5½*d.* The receipts are entered under a comprehensive head of Work Done, Materials, Stock, &c.; and a second head of Fees for Classes; and reach the sum of 514*l.* 3*s.* 11*d.*, giving an apparent surplus of 37*l.* 13*s.* 5½*d.*

But there is a general expenditure entered under the heads of rent and taxes, wages, coals, &c.; furniture, &c.; advertisements, printing, stationery; interest on loan of 100*l.*; sundries, postage, &c.; amounting to 326*l.* 13*s.* 9½*d.*, but reduced by a set-off of 47*l.* 19*s.* 3*d.* (rent of a portion of the house sub-let by the Association) to 278*l.* 14*s.* 6½*d.* This sum, divided between the two departments, gives against each a charge of 139*l.* 7*s.* 3¼*d.* To meet this the Embroidery Department has in hand 16*l.* 15*s.* 1½*d.*, and therefore labours under a deficit of 122*l.* 12*s.* 1¾*d.* The Dressmaking Department has in hand 37*l.* 13*s.* 5½*d.*, and is therefore deficient to the amount of 101*l.* 13*s.* 9¾*d.* These two deficits are met by the subscriptions of the charitable.

We come to another point in the statistical history of the society. After two years and three months of existence, the French society, which started

with five pupils, had in attendance at its schools 146 pupils, and this growth continued—for we are told that ‘so numerous became the claims for admission, both from Paris and the provinces, that it was impossible to pay regard to all of them, and a system of examination had to be instituted, designed to favour the most deserving candidates.’ The Ladies’ Dressmaking Association opened its dressmaking rooms in November 1875, with one professional worker and three partly trained ladies. In the following March the professional staff was increased to three. The terms of apprenticeship were one year’s training, after which it was at the option of the ex-apprentice to continue as a paid worker, at a salary commencing at six shillings per week.

In August 1878, after two years and ten months’ existence, the Association could state that six ladies were then employed in the workroom; fifteen previously to these had been in the room since it was opened, and ‘though circumstances’ (too often their poverty) ‘have prevented many from persevering for the required periods of training, these ladies have been greatly benefited by the instruction they have received, and if not directly earning money by their knowledge of making dresses, they are saving much by being able to make their own.’ I am quoting from the paper before spoken of as advocating the claims of the society, which appeared in the number of the *Woman’s Gazette* for August 1878.

But is it a fact that English gentlewomen are, as

a body, so far unable to make their own dresses that an expensive machinery and incessant appeals to charitable persons are necessary in order that they may be taught? My own experience is that nineteen educated English girls out of every twenty, as they leave school, are quite capable of making their own dresses in passable fashion, if they chose to do so. The deterrents are absence of pressing need and indolence, not incapacity. In many country parsonages, and in many other middle-class houses where no sewing maid is kept, a dressmaker is brought in by the day, and the girls of the house under her superintendence do a large part of the sewing to her cutting-out; and one good dress perhaps having been bought, as, together with the household sewing-machine, the stock-in-trade of the extemporised work-room, a by no means despicable result is attained, and at the least possible expense. A year's apprenticeship would save such girls nothing in money, though it would probably teach them a better fit. Any ambition that way is quite legitimate, but it should be paid for by the individual cultivating it. Will any one be found to say that the twenty-one ladies, who, up to August 1878, had been recipients of the bounty of the Dressmaking Association should absorb some 15*l.* per head public money, simply in order that their own dresses should in future have the benefit of a more artistic cut? Yet this is what the affair with most of them seems to have reduced itself to.

We ask ourselves when we see results so different,

Where was the point of departure between the English and the French society? And our answer must, I think, be—*The French society met a great want; the English society, in the matter of its dressmaking workrooms, met no want.*

The French society had the safeguard of being self-supporting, and of receiving payment from its pupils; and so was not likely to go on wasting money on objects not in demand. The English society voluntarily, and latterly without disguise, overthrew for itself one of the landmarks its French sister found of such value: namely, that ‘a training school, if started by subscription, must be made self-supporting within a short time, or else closed as unsuccessful. All pupils must pay a moderate fee for being taught.’

And partly in consequence of this it has never discovered what our analysis will have revealed to us, that it was and is expending money on an object not in demand—and with reason not in demand. In almost every issue of the *Woman's Gazette* from November 1875 down to the month we are in, the advertisement of the Dressmaking Association has made mention of the fact that the Committee have room for more pupils than come to them. One scarcely knows which appeal has been more urgent, that for money or for apprentices. Under some circumstances this might simply stand for that wise patience which will not take a rebuff from the ignorance and foolishness of those whom it would fain help, but who disdain its help.

Yet what if it be the needy gentlewomen who will not take this year's gratuitous training in dress-making who have reason on their side? The question arises, why should girls, daughters of professional men, press into, or look otherwise than askance on entrance into a trade which, under the most favourable conditions, would not offer in the future remuneration or possibilities of personal comfort equal to what would attach to the position of nurse in an English lady's household? We know that girls of the peasant and artizan classes often prefer the drudgery of dressmaking to the comparative luxury and higher remuneration of domestic service. Greater personal liberty is here the motive to the preference, but it is personal liberty of a sort which a girl of the educated classes would find thoroughly foreign to her tastes. The difficulty of making her a dressmaker at all, the difficulty which leads the advocate of the Dressmaking Association to write that, 'the conversation, associations, and companionship of even a well-regulated dressmaking establishment, are too mixed to be congenial to the tastes of girls of gentle birth, while in many they are, alas! so injurious that no parent of the upper classes would deliberately subject his child to such danger,' is simply the freedom of the ordinary dressmaking apprentice to say and do very much what she pleases. And therefore, we may ask, why not make the necessitous daughters of poor professional men, to whom the higher grades of women's work are closed, domestic nurses rather than dressmakers? To become

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a domestic nurse certainly involves no descent in the social scale that dressmaking would not involve. Good nurses are in request, especially nurses with a pure accent. A girl adopting this occupation would be immediately under the eye of an English lady. It might also be very easy to arrange that her association with the regular servants of the household should scarcely differ in any respect from that of the other ladies belonging to it. Remuneration would begin earlier and on a higher scale than with dressmaking. More than this, the ultimate remuneration would be much higher should she best herself to become a really superior upper nurse. More even than this, a nurse of the type I have in my mind could not fail, as she herself advanced in years, to have friends of the most intimate stamp in the men and women who had been her care in their childhood.

And here I must pause to say that I fear this manner of talk may offend many. To some, I know, the obtrusion of these details into the argument, the marshalling of them with so much composure, will be inexpressibly painful. There is a great deal of limp sentimentalism going about in the matter of the employment of gentlewomen. There are numbers who feel so strongly with regard to it that they cannot be induced to give their assistance to any project; no project, in short, reaches their high ideal. A great sage said, your very feeling people were apt not to do very much else for you. 'They paid you in feeling, sir.' To such it doubtless seems shockingly

cold-blooded to discuss calmly the life of a gentlewoman spent as a domestic nurse, and to affect to see beauties in it. To such also it seems almost a sin against good taste so much as to mention the few shillings a week, which is the most a poor gentlewoman can earn as a sempstress, without an interjectional sigh over the meagre sum. There would not be much harm done if the sighs and a larger sum went hand in hand, but it is not their nature to do so. They who would live a life of pity will do well not to put too much of it into words; these tend to take the vigour from it.

The kindest part to act towards the necessitous gentlewoman, of whom one who has not stayed her hand to help others could say, 'If there is any class that we need despair of finding a useful function for, it is this,' is not to be tearful and depressed on her behalf, but to be bright, prompt, and courageous with her and for her. And bearing ourselves thus, we may yield to no one in sincere sympathy for the woman of gentle nurture who finds the old map of her life torn rudely from her, and the map of a new and drear and uninhabited land put before her to con and tremble over, as that of her future country.

If I may pass the expression on from places to people and things, I would say that localism was a marked feature in a woman's mind. The old life need not have been so very good, nor so very happy, but it had at least the virtue of being familiar; and now she sees a country the very strangeness of which makes it a solitude to her. She sees only a long

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stretch of plain, barren and dull, with frowning summits barring the far horizon. If I tell her the land is sunny and the air pure on the other side, and that there is a way through, difficult, yet possible even for her, I do her no wrong; I do well by her. And even if I tell her of villages of pure delight such as her old life held no dream of, that lie embosomed on the sunny side of those hills, and that she, no less than others, may perchance reach one of these, I still do well by her. I do her wrong if I linger with her on the threshold of her old life, lamenting it for her, seeking with her whether she may not be permitted to live under its shadow since she can no longer enjoy its shelter. On the contrary, experience will but confirm that to the impoverished woman of gentle nurture it is often the only true kindness to say, 'That is broken with; you cannot piece yourself to it again—let us turn to what is next best.'

So we will no longer be afraid to discuss with all calmness the loves and friendships that may brighten the old days of the gentlewoman become domestic nurse. We can see that her character as gentlewoman might in the nursery enter essentially into her service. It is difficult to see how it is to do this in a work-room confined to persons of her own class. Were she to enter an ordinary work-room it were again easy to see how it could be; it were easy to imagine the gentlewoman becoming the pioneer of the 'higher culture' to her working sisters; that is to say, if her gentle nurture consisted of a whit more than the soft voice, and the measured move-



ments, and the knowledge of the modes of society, which are the ordinary garb of culture, if the vulgar mind did not remain beneath all this. It would be a position of danger to the pioneer herself, that no one can contest; moreover, one is bound to own that the education of the large majority of the generation just come to womanhood has not been such as to befit them for so honourable a post, because one of so much danger. This, however, is beside our immediate purpose, which is to show that the Dress-making Association, started to teach gentlewomen dressmaking over a lengthened term, and to keep them religiously apart from all other dressmaking apprentices whilst so doing, meets no want.

That technical instruction in dressmaking would be useful both to girls expecting to be heads of households and girls who may have to make their own way in life, I readily admit. But it should not take up a year of their life, and it should be paid for by themselves. Technical instruction in plain sewing and cutting out, the London Institute for the Advancement of Plain Needlework provides at a very moderate fee. A gentlewoman who could sew well and cut out children's clothes besides, might look to see her services at a premium as a nurse; these two acquirements might indeed make all the difference between her being able and not being able to make provision for the future. That the Employment Loan Fund which has its headquarters at the office of the *Woman's Gazette* (now re-named *Work and Leisure*) might find a useful



work in occasional loans of money, under proper guarantees and at a moderate rate of interest, for payment of the necessary fees, is very probable. But nothing in this at all necessitates that a large staff should be kept up, heavy office expenses incurred, and alms-money begged anxiously on every side. Were the Dressmaking Association defunct, machinery ample to meet all these modified requirements would still exist; new developments, so far as necessary, could be made without any wasteful multiplication of charitable agencies.

It should be explained that in affirming that a technical school should be self-supporting, it is by no means said that such a school is to receive no contributions whatever out of the public generosity. It is only the application of such contributions to general current expenditure, and especially if without any demand in return for clearly defined results, which is objected to. Moneys to release a given number of students from fees during the latter part of their course, in reward of extraordinary diligence during the first part; donations towards the expenses of any especially valuable series of lectures over and above the ordinary work of the school; prizes to be awarded after competition among the students—all these, be they wisely apportioned, increase the teaching capacity of the school. But subscriptions to meet the shortcomings in the everyday current expenditure do but weaken responsibility in a dangerous degree, and indeed cut at the very root of economy and efficiency.

In all this I have purposely confined my remarks to the Dressmaking Department of the Association, as it has a character and an aim special to itself. The Embroidery Department, which enjoys its public subsidy of 122*l.* 12*s.* 1½*d.* for the year, has wages for its one aim. Its members pay one guinea on entrance, and give a month's work to the institution. They then become recipients of its lawful wages and also of its begged bounty. In 1878 they received amongst them 348*l.* 19*s.* 7*d.*, that is, their work produced to them 226*l.* 7*s.* 5½*d.*; and then the society stepped in and pauperised them to the amount of 122*l.* 12*s.* 1½*d.* I shall be told this is a very unpleasant way of putting things. To pauperise is an ugly act; no one nowadays claims beauty for it. If it can be shown to me how the society's act in any way escapes the charge, no one will more readily bow to the weight of evidence.

It is not difficult to follow the line of thought which brought the society into its present unfortunate position. It would be affirmed by its promoters that a lady ought to earn a certain sum at embroidery working so many hours a day. Practically it would be found that the workers did not and could not earn this sum by more than one-third, and this one-third deficit would be made up to them by alms-money. All experience tends to show that both the worker and her work deteriorate under a *régime* of this kind. It would shock our moral sense if it were proposed to give the thousands of sempstresses in London year by year a weekly dole of five shillings a

head. Yet what evil would follow if the sempstresses of London were pauperised that does not follow on making paupers of the workers for the Embroidery Association? That distress and want beset the path of both no one will deny; but it is distress and want that will be better met by thought and personal exertion than by weekly doles. It cannot be requisite at this day to urge that to help the poor is not that mere luxury of the well-to-do it once was held to be, but work of the most responsible exacting kind that the rich from their larger amount of leisure are more especially called to engage in, but in which good intentions alone as little suffice and are as devoid of result as in any other work.

Can it be brought forward as an ascertained fact that the seven or eight ladies who, I suppose, share the money of the Association between them, are all either bodily or mentally unfit for any practicable trade or calling whatsoever that could bring them in a livelihood, or at least provide them with as large a sum yearly as the Embroidery Association between wages and alms-money does? Are none of them fit for the place of domestic nurse? Could none of them enter shops? Are they totally without other means on which with the genuine wages of the Association they could subsist not too hardly? If they cannot subsist on these, have they no relatives who can be brought to meet their remaining wants? for if personal independence be a valuable quality that should not be lightly broken down, family independence is a scarcely less valuable quality.

If these questions must be, as there are strong reasons for doubting, answered in the negative, I must still demur to the action of the Embroidery Association. Wages and alms-giving cannot be kept too distinct. If the worker earn ten shillings a week and absolutely need fifteen shillings, let the ten shillings be put down as the wages of her labour. But if she be provided with the five shillings also, let it be called what it is—a gift. I would have the two kept so well apart that I would not have the same body act as employer and almoner. The Work Societies should keep strictly to their rôle of providing poor gentlewomen who do not know their way in the market with wages for work, with more or less of technical teaching; and as they would naturally become cognisant of many a sad case of privation, it should form a part of their organisation to be affiliated to one or other of the purely charitable agencies. Whilst the charitable agency would often send its petitioners to the Work Society, either for permanent or temporary employment, as would best meet each several case, so the Work Society would often ask investigation, and, if need were shown, help from the charitable agency for workers whose absolute wants could not be met by any wages they could earn with the society.

It will fall to us later on to consider how the combination in a Work Society of employer and almoner cripples it financially.

It may here be remarked that the Embroidery Association is the only society within my knowledge

where, the working members being very few, the amount of alms-money paid over to each is so large as to be in effect a considerable pension. The wording of the report in no way conveys the idea that the money of the subscribers is to be appropriated to pensioning the workers.

A word as to the history of the Somerset Street School since the year ending December 1878. The year ending December 1878 found the school in a transition state. It had changed its name from The Ladies' Dressmaking and Embroidery Association, to Ladies' School of Technical Needlework. An attempt was being made, too, to change its character from that of a charitable association to that of a limited liability company, with a capital, first of 10,000*l.*; then, as the project hung fire, of 5,000*l.*; then of 1,000*l.*

But since the many influential and wealthy personages whose names appeared on the prospectus as patrons or patronesses had not sufficient faith in the future of the school to subscribe for more than a very insignificant number of shares, and as the old supporters of the school manifested an equal want of faith, it is not surprising that the general public were totally apathetic. During the first half of 1880 spasmodic appeals were made to the benevolent to lodge small investments with the school, which was now described as a semi-charitable, semi-commercial undertaking, in the hope that in this way a capital fund of 1,000*l.* might yet be raised. So little response was made to these appeals that in the July

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of 1880 the Committee decided to recur to the old plan of receiving subscriptions and donations. That which had been subscribed as share capital was by consent of the subscribers transformed into general donations, and has, in regular course, as the report for the year ending December 1880 shows us, been consumed for current expenditure.

## CHAPTER III.

WE come to the third institution on our list—the Ladies' Work Society, 31 Sloane Street, which enjoys the privilege of having for its president H.R.H. the Marchioness of Lorne, who is also a member of its executive committee. Her Royal Highness is understood, some two years ago, to have expressed an anxious desire that the work should take more practical channels than it had hitherto done. It may be noted as perhaps one result of the good influence here brought to bear, that the committee of this society wander much less in their statement of its objects than do the committee of any other society. Its objects are given as—first, to benefit the workers; secondly, to raise the standard of needlework.

Be the credit of the better management of this society whose it may, it is pleasant to be able to affirm one's belief that at no point is it so great a failure as are its fellows, and that, indeed, at many points it stands out in strong and favourable contrast to them—markedly in its receptivity to new ideas, and in the comparatively small amount of its almsgiving. The society appears to possess no proper balance-sheet and to issue no report: two serious



lapses from good order that cannot be too soon remedied. But by the courtesy of the manager I obtained much of the information a balance-sheet would give, through the answers I received from her to a series of questions sent in to her at her own request when she learned the scope of my inquiries.

I gather that at the period of my entrance on the inquiry, the number of working members on the books was from 290 to 300. The amount of donations, subscriptions, or proceeds of entertainments received during the year ending December 1878 was 184*l.* 17*s.* I have only the sums paid over to workers for the last half of the year; from the beginning of July, that is, to the end of December. These amount to 771*l.* 6*s.* 9*d.*, and this would be less the sum received from customers by the amount of a commission charged in the case of sales, of 2½*d.* in the shilling (a little over 20 per cent.) on art-work; and of 1½*d.* in the shilling (12½ per cent.) on plain sewing—less the sums received from customers, also by the cost of transmission of money in the form of post-office orders or otherwise.

Of this sum of 771*l.* 6*s.* 9*d.*, 70½ per cent. (543*l.* 15*s.* 10¼*d.*) was on account of work to order; 29½ per cent. (227*l.* 10*s.* 10¾*d.*) on account of sales from the stock selected, paid for, and worked up by the working members on their own responsibility, and kept by them at their own risk at the society's dépôt.


We will in the first instance deal with the two sums separately. The question we have to answer is,

out of this 543*l.* 15*s.* 10½*d.* on account of work to order, how much is wages? At Sloane Street the worker is, as a rule, responsible for the purchase of materials even for work to order, unless the customer herself will supply these, which in the case of plain sewing she commonly does. This sum of 543*l.* 15*s.* 10½*d.* must then on a moderate estimate be drawn upon by a fifth for cost of materials and carriage, which leaves it at 435*l.* 0*s.* 8½*d.*

We quit these figures for the moment to take up the amount sold from the stock of working members, as supplied by them to, and kept at, the society's depôt at their own risk. We have had it in evidence that they received in the half-year on this account 227*l.* 10*s.* 10¾*d.* As customers will here supply no part of the materials, we have for that purpose and for cost of carriage to make deduction, not of a fifth, but of a third, which leaves the sum at 151*l.* 13*s.* 11½*d.* Joining this to the sum we had previously dealt with, we have a total of 586*l.* 14*s.* 7½*d.* The same rule as to postage holding good at Sloane Street as at Baker Street—we have to make a similar deduction of two shillings per head per year for stamps and stationery. With 300 working members this gives us 15*l.* to deduct for the half-year, further deducting our sum to 571*l.* 14*s.* 7½*d.* There is another deduction to make which does not appear on the surface. The sums we have been dealing with are the amounts paid over to workers after commission is deducted; but commission being charged on the selling price, it is of course charged on three heads—on the cost of the

material, on the wages of labour, and on the profit put on the manufactured article. It follows that a fifth of the commission charged on order work sales, and a third of the commission charged on sales from workers' stock, stand as money expended by them in purchase of material. A deduction of about 29% must be made for this from the wages fund, which finally stands at 542*l.* 14*s.* 7½*d.* for the half-year.

But my readers, remembering the course taken with regard to the Baker Street Society, will know that though this may be the wages fund for the half-year, it does not represent the net cash results to the working members for the half-year. By arrangement with the manager I was enabled to obtain a precise reply to my question, 'What amount of stock belonging to workers, taken at its priced value as for sale, is now on the society's premises?' Stock on a given date was taken, and the amount found to be 720*l.* The first fact we light on is that the working members have on stock work to make a standing investment of 240*l.* cash for materials, with all the attendant labour (certainly to an equal sum) thrown in, in order that they may obtain wages amounting in cash to 303*l.* 7*s.* 10½*d.* in the year. Then we note that, taking the 227*l.* 10*s.* 10¾*d.* of the half-year as a fair average of the sales from stock, this 720*l.* of goods would be one year and seven months turning over—a fact we shall find of great importance to the pockets of the working members when we consider the nature of the stock, the perishableness of its material, and the variableness of its fashion. No inconsiderable



part of the stock, in short, must either be sold below cost price for material, with cost of labour ignored, or must be withdrawn, new stock being substituted for it.

What then are our ultimate figures as the net cash result in the year to the working members? Taking the half-yearly wages fund of 542*l.* 14*s.* 7½*d.* as we made it, as a fair average, we have a sum of 1,085*l.* 9*s.* 3*d.* for the year. But then taking into consideration the disproportionate standing investment found necessary in order that the sales from stock may reach even the amount they do, bearing in mind the rapid deterioration of that investment, the withdrawals from it, I cannot doubt that it is an investment which has virtually to be repeated in each year; and that, therefore, our deduction of one-third for material and cost of carriage must not be on the year's sale of stock only—on 455*l.* 1*s.* 9½*d.*, that is—but on 1,175*l.* 1*s.* 9½*d.*, and must amount to not 151*l.* 13*s.* 11*d.* only, but to 391*l.* 13*s.* 11*d.*

It follows that the net cash results in the year to the working members, through the action of their society, are not 1,085*l.* 9*s.* 3*d.*, but 845*l.* 9*s.* 3*d.*—about 2*l.* 16*s.* 8*d.* a head.


These figures do indeed contrast favourably with those any other society can bring forward. The alms-money is no more than 184*l.* 17*s.*, and therefore 660*l.* 12*s.* 3*d.* (2*l.* 4*s.* 0½*d.* per head) is genuinely earned by the working members. But a further consideration of the figures will show that not a penny of this is due to the sales on workers' stock;

that there is, in fine, a dead loss yearly to the members on that stock, though the income of the society itself benefit by commissions on sales from it to the amount of some 90*l.* a year. If the workers' stock were effaced, and the commissions on sales from order-work increased by another penny in the shilling, both the society and the working members would find themselves better off.

It is not suggested that this extra penny should be levied: on the contrary, a course is hereafter to be mapped out which will include the entire abolition of sales on commission: the abolition, too, of that unpleasant item, alms-money. Moreover, this course is to involve the change of the working members from three hundred manufacturing units, employing the society as a commission agent, but having no other common interest and no common business knowledge, into three hundred wage-earners, employed by the society, which would now become the manufacturer and acquire all possible business knowledge for the common benefit of its working members.

The details of this and other reforms will come up for consideration later on; but it may here be stated as the writer's belief that if these reforms be adopted by this society, with its valuable patronage, important connection, large nucleus of order-work, and receptivity to new ideas, the net cash results to the workers will be increased beyond all present expectation.

. . . . .



At this point it was my purpose to have entered on an examination in detail of the balance-sheet of the Ladies' Industrial Society, 11 Lower Porchester Street, which enjoys the patronage of the Working Ladies' Guild. But I regret to say that, in spite of repeated applications, extending over nine months and at first favourably received, I cannot obtain any figures whatsoever, though I have offered to meet any expense incurred in procuring them. The officials and committee of the society do not themselves seem to have any precise knowledge of its financial position, and they appear quite unable to see why they and the subscribing public and the poor subscribing working members (for this society asks a 5s. fee annually of its working members, besides a commission on sales of 1d. in the shilling) should not contentedly continue in this state of ignorance.

But though officials and committee are ignorant of the precise financial position of the society, on one point they are not ignorant, and this is, that the results to the working members of the society's action are eminently unsatisfactory. I know enough of the society to affirm my belief that it should never be so much as classed with Sloane Street, and that were its figures forthcoming it would be found to outbid Baker Street and Somerset Street beyond all fair competition in the lack of business order in all its arrangements.

If this be doubted, let the committee produce the asked-for figures, which indeed should never have

been withheld, but should have been looked on as the common property of the public, that any one of the public had the right to call for and obtain, though every one else chose to let his right lie dormant.

There is little doubt that public opinion is more and more tending to demand this position of the dispensers of charitable funds. The Charity Organisation Society in its inquiries has been met by the assertion that the Ladies' Industrial Society is not within the sphere of its operations, since it does not ask donations from the general public. But there is a body of subscribers, and in the circular to be had by any one calling at 11 Lower Porchester Street, and sent by post to any one writing for information respecting the institution, I find this paragraph, 'Gifts for sale are thankfully received.' So that, what would be at the best but a poor technical defence to resort to, is negatived by the society's own published circular—for I need scarcely remark that when gifts in kind are asked in order to reduce them into money, it is but another form of asking subscriptions.

The action of the committee in declining to give any figures has not been ingenuous ; but beyond this the only fault alleged against them is that they are superficial ; they have taken up work to which they have not thought it necessary to make themselves equal. Though it were their own pockets only which suffered, this state of things would still be most mischievous to the cause of self-help. But it will be

found that the poor working members as well have to pay largely. This result must seem an absurd and almost improbable parody on the charitable objects put forward by the society, and when the committee go through their books—as I cannot doubt they will when they see their work thus broadly characterised—and find my words confirmed, no one will regret so much as they that the system was not earlier departed from.

Work societies exist not only in London, but also in many large provincial towns; and my attention has been called to three of these provincial societies more especially. That at Brighton differs in no respect from those in London: its deficit is made up by subscriptions; its working members supply stock, much of which they do not sell.

The Ladies' Work Society, Bold Street, Liverpool, also adopts to the full the unsound courses of its London sisterhood. It appears to have taken the Ladies' Industrial Society as its model; the rules being almost identical. The annual fee paid by a working member is five shillings: a commission of one penny is also charged on sales. The working members supply the stock of the society, and whilst they nominally earn 2*l.* 19*s.* 11*d.* a head, the net cash results to them as a body are, that they are out of pocket considerably at the close of the year by the action of the society; whilst they have cast on them the onus of being recipients of alms-money.

The Yorkshire Depôt for the Sale of Ladies' Work, Oxford Place, Leeds, is at present in its infancy; but



to it belongs the honour of an earnest desire to make itself self-supporting. Beginning without either fee or commission, its committee has, since the issue of the last report in my hands, decided on taking both: the direct object of the change being to do away with subscriptions. It is, however, in the wrong groove of allowing its members to supply their own stock, and its success or failure must depend on whether it can get on other ground than this.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE question that now meets us, the question originating these papers, is, 'Is reform possible to these societies?—and, if so, what character must the reform take?'

The societies between them share some thousands of pounds of alms-money annually; their work has large social bearings; it arose out of a very widespread and piteous need—neither from the side of the mistakes they commit, nor the good they could do but have not done, can the writer agree that they should be let alone, as some say, to die a natural death. This is to treat the matter as though the insignificance of the results at present attained made the object insignificant.

For it was not that the promoters of the Work Societies entered with pomp of preparation on a field where there was no work to be done; no such real misfortune as this befel them. On the contrary, there was abundance of work, but no applied philanthropy to tell them how to do it.

Were they therefore not to enter on it, or having entered on it, to withdraw? There are people who dissipate themselves over any number of the

best-intentioned but most ill-digested acts of beneficence. But there are others who keep up their whole life long an attitude of reserving themselves for some specially suitable good deed which the world may be excused for thinking is very late in presenting itself. The promoters of the Work Societies do well to be constant to their work, though they might with advantage be less constant to their first ideas, formed when they had little or nothing to guide them, of the course that work ought to take.

A great political economist pronouncing that certain laws have somewhat of the character of physical truths, was fond of using the formula, 'whether mankind like it or not.' Given a certain course, he affirmed, a certain result will follow. 'The opinions, or the wishes, which may exist on these different matters, do not control the things themselves.'

'Whether mankind like it or not'—to propagate the truth of this formula in a region where it has been but too little accepted, may prove to be one valuable service done us by these pioneers in the field of the employment of gentlewomen. In that field certain sound economic laws can no more be departed from with impunity than in ordinary commercial life.

The great misfortune of the promoters of the Work Societies is, that, betrayed by the thoroughly kindly desire to do better by their workers than circumstances would permit, they left the safe road of

sound economics for devious by-paths of erratic almsgiving, only to find that their capacity to do even ordinarily well by their workers had left them. Till now they have found no one amongst them with despotic power enough to bring them back over the somewhat rough road of return. But it is safe to say there will be fewer mistakes made hereafter because of the mistakes made in this instance; and there is ground for hoping that a substantial success yet awaits the very societies who have suffered the failures.

The writer's contention has been and is still that the societies ought to be, and can be, made self-supporting; and this with much larger money results to the workers than at present. She trusts not to stand accused of egotism if she make the main support of her position the experiment which she herself has for nearly eleven years carried on in the employment of gentlewomen, on her own capital solely, with the result of that capital at this day remaining intact. The experiment has not been on a small scale; her workers are some hundreds in number, and the payments to these are in the form of wages.

But attention has not been fixed solely on direct modes of acquiring wages for the workers; the advancement of the art of needlework has been kept steadily in view as in more ways than one an indirect road to the same goal; the general training becomes with each year more strictly technical. Workers are made to see that, being desirous of

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entering a paid field of labour, they, for those hours they surrender to work, and with respect to the specified amount of labour they stipulate to give for a specified sum of money, no longer remain amateurs.

There have been times in the life of the undertaking when success appeared to hang in the balance; but on the whole it has been steadily progressive. In the October of this year it is to enter on a new phase. From that date the books will be audited annually by a professional accountant. This audit is to be as complete as though the undertaking were public and not, as it is, private. And in each year, if, after payment of five per cent. interest on the capital, and a due contribution to the risk fund, there remain any profits, such profits will be divided with the workers—the share of each probably taking the form of a percentage on the wages earned by her in the course of the year; thus securing to her all the benefits of co-operation without any of its risks.

If the writer ask herself, what point of advantage she could in the outset have possessed over the Work Societies, that she has met with so different a result, she would say, none, except an absolute belief in the duty of non-pauperisation, and that she was dealing with her own capital in place of the charitable contributions of other people, and therefore her action was at once more cautious and more bold than that of the societies. Charitable contributions have an astonishing capacity for dribbling away, no one quite knows how; at the same time, upon the strength of

them and with the divided powers of a committee, it is difficult to found anything except a hand-to-mouth policy. The writer's scheme in the outset presupposed gradual progression to an end, and as sole capitalist she had despotic authority.

But there are reforms possible to the societies that would place them in no less favourable a position, and these reforms are now to be our consideration.

Afterwards to be treated in full, they may be defined in brief as:—

I. That the limits of expectation out of each experiment be carefully and precisely stated.

II. That subscriptions be dealt with not as income, but as capital.

III. That there be a reduction of unproductive expenditure.

IV. That sales on commission be abolished. That the societies take up all orders entirely on their own responsibility; and that stock be made in some one or more branches.

V. That customers' own materials be not taken to be made up, but that all materials be provided by the society.

VI. That a selection be made within strict limits of other goods than the work of gentlewomen in which to traffic.

VII. That a manager be appointed who, subject to all due financial checks, shall within well-defined limits have undivided authority.

I. That the limits of expectation out of each experiment be carefully and precisely stated.

Then if an experiment fall short of the stated limits of expectation, let it be written down by so much a failure, and unhesitatingly faced as such. For the happy case of its success beyond expectation we need formulate no course of conduct.

By careful and precise statement I mean, first in the minds of the promoters, next in their appeals to subscribers, lastly in their proposals to applicants for working membership. The aims of all the work societies have been too general. It may be said of them, 'that they ran too fast uphill at first and have been out of breath ever since.' In place of working from a small but solid nucleus which should continually gather to itself new accretions, they have started with a large fair-weather building, of which if any part remain to them in the end they will be fortunate. They have brought down on themselves by their lack of study of the position, the necessity for more than the ordinary amount of retraction common to all human plans. Their success or failure must now depend on their capacity for courageously accepting this necessity.

Subsistence, remunerative employment, aid to subsistence, independence of position, all kinds of benefits were to flow from the associated action of a certain number of ladies, well-intentioned in the extreme, but quite ignorant of the nature of the task they were undertaking.

It is a searching question at this time of day to

ask, how many of these benefits have in a general way come to the working members? No stress can be laid on isolated cases, unless indeed as evidence against the usefulness of the institution putting them forward. Let us suppose the Gentlewoman's Self-Help Institute, with its 330 members, provides three with a subsistence. Subsistence in the case of gentlewomen can hardly be put at a less rate than 52*l.* a year; thus we have 156*l.* expended. Let us further suppose that the institute provides eight members with regular employment at remunerative rates, and let us put this at 15*s.* a week for each of the eight; we have here a sum of 312*l.*, which with the subsistence fund of the three members gives us a total of 468*l.* But the net cash result in a year to the whole 330 members was only 426*l.* 10*s.* 6*d.*, even with all the subscriptions thrown in, and at a sacrifice of all the labour of the workers.

It was therefore palpably impossible for the institute to provide so many as three persons with a subsistence and eight with regular employment at remunerative rates, even were the 319 remaining working members completely ignored in the distribution.

As aids to subsistence we have already found its bounties too precarious and too trivial to be relied on; and with regard to independence of position, a pen should have been run through that phrase long ago.

How then did it result with my own undertaking?



In the very beginning I worked out for myself four limiting rules. First, never to permit myself to pauperise my workers; secondly, not to permit them to lay themselves open to risks to which they were plainly unequal; thirdly, not to enter upon any new branch of handiwork unless I or some one of those assisting me should have gained practical mechanical acquaintance with it; fourthly, whenever I did take up any new branch of handiwork, to collect all possible information as to the wages paid in it by the trade, and to take a high standard of these as my scale of payment.

I am bound to say quite as much pressure has been put upon me by applicants for work to break the second rule as to break the first. Such unlimited belief have they shown in the saleable qualities of their 'fancy work,' that I might have stocked twenty depôts with goods to be sold on commission, and have paid all the current expenses of my undertaking out of entrance fees collected from the poor deluded victims. The most angry individual ever seen in the Telegon School show-room was a lady to whom had been refused the privilege of being thus deluded.

With regard to the third rule, the idea underlying it entered into the whole spirit of the work. If amateurship was the fault of capitalist and workers alike, it was at least a fault each day would tend to cure if the right means were taken. The right means, as they presented themselves to me and to the ladies immediately assisting me, were, first,

always in any given set of circumstances to endeavour to ascertain what business people would do in like case; next, to make such difference in the conduct of our work, and such only, as the difference in our aims appeared to warrant.

I believed that the principle of natural selection prevailed in buying and selling as in so much else, and that the ordinary business methods would have the balance of probability in favour of their correctness. On reflection I might decide that the conditions under which we worked could consist only with a further development in a new direction; but this was to decide in strict conformity with the principle. I do not blind myself to the fact that I depart from the business code in employing a body of lady workers scattered over England, Ireland, and Scotland, when professional sempstresses in London at 15s. a week could do the work more cheaply (so far as my pocket is concerned), though not better. I depart from the business method, but on reflection and in the interest of an object in strict accordance, it is to be believed, with sound economic laws.

It may here be said that amongst the retractions I myself have to make, is the withdrawal of a phrase formerly used by me, and adhered to by me for a long time with some pertinacity. I have for long spoken of my work as *not that of a charitable association, but that of a house of business*. I knew this was not a perfect definition, on the contrary it was a very imperfect one, and true only in a very limited sense, but I was not clear in my mind how to

express it better. I would now speak of the work as not that of a charitable association, nor yet that of a house of business, but a special undertaking based on a sound economic principle, having training and wages for its object. The alteration of phrase gives in effect a new and very valuable limitation, of which more has to be said hereafter.


On one side, and on one side only, has the business element been strictly preserved—and that is, as towards the customer. The manager of one of the work societies informs me her society never permits worker and customer to come together, as the customer is given to grinding the worker down. A view of the case not, to my mind, borne out by facts. At the Telegon School worker and customer are not brought together, in order that the latter may feel herself as fully at liberty to discuss her purchases as she would be in a shop. That the customer should feel this is of paramount importance in the true interests of the workers.

Customers come away from most of the Work Dépôts saying, ‘Ladies’ work and therefore very dear, though it would be treason to tell them so. Besides, one never knows how an order will be executed, and one cannot make stipulations as one would in a shop. We had better go where we can have responsible people to deal with.’ The work societies, it is certain, lose many customers in this way.

Paying my workers at the Telegon School for their work whether it be sold or not, and at a price previously ascertained to be good in the market, I

intercept all loss and risk, and become this responsible person to the customer. Customers are not to be treated as necessary evils, but as the workers' best friends; and not only their requirements, but their very prejudices have to be considered. The dearness and bad execution of gentlewomen's work have become proverbial, and with reason. And thoroughly good and very cheap work, being gentlewomen's, still suffers prejudice in the mind of the public through past sins against sound economy. It has cost me eleven years and an expenditure of many thousands to convince a sufficiently large number of persons that gentlewomen's work can be both good and cheap; and it is because the expenditure under the head of advertising can now be diminished, it is because the work now advertises itself over a sufficiently large area, that there is a good hope of a distinct profit after October next on the work, which profit will be divided with the workers.

The societies would effect a reform which would bear them good fruit, if, in place of announcing the contrary fact, they claimed authority to put the price to all work sent them for sale. It must be borne in mind that ladies have rarely a correct standard by which to judge the value of their handiwork, and as a rule think it worth much more than it is. Generally their standard is what they have known their work to fetch at bazaars: they expect to be paid a trifle, but only a trifle, under this. Fixing price by any one not an expert can only be more or less ignorant guesswork. The workers cannot pos-



sibly become experts, but it behoves the managers to become such for the workers; and they, not the workers, should decide the price at which work is to be offered for sale.

Then, and when the societies have effected the further reform of buying all work from the worker, they too will have become sufficiently responsible people to the customer; and in the stray case of a purchaser really seeking to get goods below market value, they can hold their ground courteously, but all the more firmly as being more informed respecting it. But what they will find is, that customers bargain so much because they are not at all convinced in their minds that they are not being overcharged. Give them confidence on this head, and one is spared much of the bargaining. This is why I have always insisted so strongly on preserving the business element as towards the customer. She was to be the workers' best friend; not because she was to do an act of charity in making a purchase, but because she was to have her own wants met so well and cheaply, that she would be sure to come again when next she needed similar articles, and also to send her acquaintances; and thus regular work at regular prices could with growing security be given out to an increasingly large body of workers, whilst advertising expenses became smaller.

As to the fourth rule, the evidence offered me was apparently of the most conflicting kind, and had to be reconciled. Thus, one informant, himself an employer of female labour in Derbyshire, told me

that the women there earned at clocking stockings from 9s. to 12s. a week—‘very little more,’ he added, ‘than they earn at plain sewing. But they do earn a little more.’ This was in Derbyshire, a manufacturing county where wages are not low.

Then I had ladies applying to me for work, who, guided by what they had been told in the columns of a ladies’ newspaper, expected to earn 1l. a week at plain sewing. The newspaper article had said this was to be done in London by a good plain sewer without difficulty. On the other hand there were the sad tales told of large bodies of sempstresses in London, who working for East End houses, or under middle-women, earned no more than 4s. to 6s. a week.

Again, in Buckinghamshire, a county where a great deal of embroidery is done, very few of the workers, a collector tells me, can earn so much as 7s. 6d. a week; those who do so are quite the exception. Ireland sends us a large proportion of the hand-sewing offered in London; and wages there are lower still. France is also sending us a yearly increasing supply of very well made underlinen; and when we are incidentally told that a needlewoman in the Beauvais district considers her fortune made if she be taken on at the Beauvais tapestry works, as then she earns a shilling a day and has constant employment, we can draw some conclusion as to what the average wages are, since there is seen in them such a contrast.

All this was given me to consider, and mean-

while the expectant gentlewoman with her vision of 1*l.* a week earned with ease by plain sewing, was on my hands to be provided for as best might be. In this dilemma a friend kindly volunteered to go the round of the leading shops in town as an applicant for work. If the 1*l.* a week as regular wage were indeed given, I intended to ask work for my workers of the shops who gave it. To get at a definite result the lady in question took one article of under-linen to all ; and in each case, after making her application and having it entertained, asked about what price would be paid her for making a garment precisely like it. At no place was stock work to be had, but in many places good sewers could be taken on for order work, which, however, could not be promised with absolute regularity.


In every case but one the remark was made to my kind volunteer, ‘I suppose you have women under you.’ Of course this pointed at once to a general employment of middle-women. The price offered her for making an article similar to the one she produced varied from 1*s.* 9*d.* to 2*s.* 9*d.* At one large establishment the work was cut out before being given out ; in every other case the worker would be given out so much material, and whether the order were for one of an article or for six, she would have to cut it out, and to advantage—otherwise she would be short of material—to cut it out, too, as a rule from a made-up pattern ; and if she could not do this accurately without taking the pattern in pieces, she would have to put that together again before returning it.

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At the one shop where the middle-woman system was not brought up, my informant was told that pay at the rate of 2s. 9d. for the article she showed would enable her to earn 15s. a week. And were it not that she would have more or less cutting out to do, which would in my opinion on an average lower the wage to 14s. or even 13s. 6d., I could endorse this assertion—and for the reason that my order-workers, being paid at the rate of 2s. 9d. for this same article, my cutter-out delivering the work to them not only cut out, but with full directions for meeting any special difficulty in the making, they do earn 15s. a week at the work.

In the one case, where 1s. 9d. only was offered for making such an article as that produced, it was said, 'Our women earn from 3l. to 4l. 10s. a week.'

'But,' said my friend, 'you do not mean to tell me I myself could make from six to eight dozen of these in the week? I could not make half a dozen.' The reply was, 'Oh, that is not our affair.' And there and everywhere else the middle-woman system was in full force—from no special liking for it on the part of the shopkeeper, it is right to think, but because it happens constantly that an order to be got in to time must be apportioned amongst several workers, and then collected from them; and full as his own hands are, it is much easier for him to have one person responsible for this redelivery to him than to have ten. For forty years at least agitation has been going on against the middle-woman system, with small practical result if we are to believe what





we hear. And the question arises whether the agitation has taken the practical form of recognising that the middle-women do certain definite work and accept certain definite responsibilities: and of asking if this work could be done as effectively at a cheaper rate, and by methods less open to abuse.

The Woman's Protective and Provident League has been the means of developing considerable financial ability amongst the working women. Would it not be possible for the League to form an association of sempstresses themselves, to whom a loan might, if necessary in the commencement, be made, and whose object should be to select some few of their own number to fulfil the middle-woman's office for the whole at a proper rate of remuneration—that office being to procure the work from the shops, cut it out, give it out, collect and inspect it, and when necessary, turn it back; pay the individual workers, redeliver the work to the shopkeeper, and meet his reception of it, as satisfactory to him or the reverse?

The suggestion is left for what it be worth with those who have more time to give to the question of its practicability than I have, and are also better able to deal with it. It could be said of the League if it undertook this task, what Lord Derby said of the coffee tavern originators: 'The pioneers of such a movement must be prepared to run a little risk. One of the advantages of the movement was that if it failed, nothing worse would happen than that a little money would be lost. If it succeeded, it would

have brought about gradually and unostentatiously what might end in being a very great and real social reform.'

To return to the immediate subject—the evidence produced seemed to point conclusively to the fact that the rate of wages in London for the best paid sempstresses, namely, those on shop order work, was not above 15s. a week, and was commonly below it by so much of this sum as was rightly or wrongly intercepted by the middle-woman. Upon this evidence I decided so to pay my order work as that it should give a worker working ten hours daily a wage of from 14s. to 15s. a week. If a worker be discovered, as has been the case in a few instances, giving the work out to others at a lower rate, her name is immediately removed from the books. The cutters-out do much of the work which, in the case of a shop, commonly falls on the middle-woman; and what the cutters-out do not do is done by the head of the department—so that the wages paid the worker are for sewing only, and come immediately into the hands of the sempstress.

We now come to stock work, and a correct decision with regard to this was of still greater importance, as by far the larger number of the workers prefer stock work to order work with its more stringent conditions as to time.

Evidence has been produced as to the wages of sempstresses in France. In many parts of Ireland (in which country much of the stock work for England is made) 7s. 6d. a week is, I am informed, considered

a good wage. But in the district round Belfast the pay is somewhat higher than this, whilst it is lower in the district round Cork. In the East End of London, where alone in the metropolis stock work would be done, sempstresses' wages are said to vary from 4s. a week to 8s. In the course of all my research I have never heard 9s. a week spoken of in connection with plain sewing on stock work. It seemed to me, therefore, that to pay the stock-workers one-third less than the order-workers would be to put them in a good position as to market rates.

Thus on the article of underlinen taken round to the shops, and the payment for order work on which was put by them at from 2s. 9d. to 1s. 9d., the stock-worker would be paid by me 1s. 10d. against the order-worker's 2s. 9d.—higher, that is, by 1d. and all the middle-woman's gains, than the smaller shops' order-workers are paid. As the rate of payment for my order-workers is from 14s. to 15s. a week, it would at first sight appear that that of the stock-workers being by scale one-third less, would be from 9s. to 10s. a week. But in consequence of the stock-workers keeping on one kind of garment sometimes for months together, they attain greater relative speed, and some earn as much as 12s. a week.


This illustration of the conclusions come to in the plain sewing branch must stand for what was done in every other branch: each was equally well-considered. Embroidery in silk and designing for the same, it need hardly be said, bring the worker a

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much higher rate of remuneration than plain sewing does.

It must be understood that the wages as decided on in each branch, are paid without abatement for the expenses of training amateurs in the production of marketable work, nay, in the very habits of work itself; without abatement for three-fourths (the proportion borne by me) of the expense of transmission of work, often to and from the most remote parts of the kingdom; with no deduction for the expense of transmitting money to the worker when the sum paid is over 1*l.*; with no deduction for the postage of letters in reply to a worker, unless this be incurred through her whim or wilful neglect; without abatement for the extraordinary amount of stock in the form of unworked-up material necessarily kept out for long periods, when the habits of the workers are as desultory and uncertain as are those of poor gentlemen—or the further extraordinary amount of made-up stock necessarily kept in hand on account of this same uncertainty of habit. The wages are paid on a scale high in the ordinary market; and all expenses additional to what would be incurred were ordinary workwomen concerned, are intended to be met out of what would in a business concern be the shopkeeper's profits.

Later I shall have to show how, by always keeping in view the educating element in the work, this can be done without pauperising the worker.



## CHAPTER V.

WE started with the proposition that the limits of expectation out of each experiment be carefully and precisely stated.

The initial difficulty that met both the work societies and myself was, the unfortunate fact that we could so rarely get that most useful auxiliary, excitement to thrift, on our side. The majority of our workers could not look to bettering their position with us, the melancholy hope of preventing its getting worse was all they could entertain. The work societies met the difficulty boldly by writing down their wishes as their programme. On the other hand, I have always believed, and I think I may say acted on my belief, that in spite of the personal unpleasantness connected with such a course, to keep our promises well *within* our powers of performance was our absolute duty, unless we would cut at the very root of self-help. Our workers are an exceptionally difficult people to deal with, but to buoy them up with fallacious programmes is of as little avail as to tell the sick child that the nauseous physic it must take will be pleasant to the taste; the *ruse* answers for three minutes, but the illness

lasts longer than the three minutes, and there is more physic to be taken.

Bound up with the difficulty that the majority of our workers cannot hope to better their position with us, is the very fact that they are gentlewomen. When the fine creed, 'He is gentil that doth gentil deedes,' becomes current in every rank of our society, this particular trouble will no longer exist. But meanwhile, as says Figaro to Count Almaviva in the play, so have we to say to the needy gentlewomen, 'Vous vous êtes donné la peine de naître.' A woman of the ordinary hand-working classes is open to doing many things whilst remaining at heart modest and womanly, which a gentlewoman could not do without running grave risk of breaking down the barriers both of her modesty and her womanliness, and this for the simple reason that the things in question were within the etiquette of the ordinary hand-working classes, but without the etiquette of the gentlewoman's class.

Many gentlewomen rise above the etiquette of their class, and do whatever their hand finds to do, and in the most practical way possible, without any damage to their moral fibre or any loss of spiritual beauty; but these are the uncommon characters, and whilst I have had uncommon characters on my books for a time to whom my work was, as it were, a raft to keep themselves afloat on till they could reach to something better, it is from the common-place people who make up the majority of men and women that the main body of our recruits must

come. And the faith of these is at all times as the faith of the special coterie to which they happen to belong, that and nothing higher; and such as their faith is, so are their works.

When a worker is uncivil in her application for work, ungracious in her acceptance of the trouble taken to put her in the way of it, carping as to the conditions without which it would be folly to attempt to enter into an engagement towards her, oblivious of her own side of the contract, always on the aggressive in her interpretation of your side of it, you may conclude she belongs to a circle where work is considered an indignity and a bore, and whether it be aid to subsistence or mere pocket money she desire, it is a grievance to her that she has to work to get it, and in her incivility and ungraciousness she is only transferring her sense of a grievance from the work to you.

Then there is the worker who would not for the world have a suspicion of trade come between the wind and her nobility; just as in Clough's time it was said, that to be an atheist at Oxford was socially preferable to being a Dissenter, so to this worker it seems much less demeaning to be an object of charity than to be engaged in traffic. At present she rather likes a dash of charity in any society by which she benefits; it is more respectable. I think I should stand higher with her if I would only take moneys from the public purse; but she allows that I may be singular to eccentricity, and eccentricity is always respectable.

One of the ladies assisting me was talking with a worker of this class who was living at a home which was largely supported by charity, and yet was so little flourishing that the necessity for closing it was under discussion. Said the lady, 'This home of yours would have much greater chance of life if the charity were withdrawn and it were carried on upon the principle of making two ends meet.' 'But then,' said the worker, with a shocked expression of face, 'it would be nothing more than a common lodging-house.'

All this is but the tradition of her coterie. Retail shopkeeping is doubtless not an elevating pursuit. If the methods of distribution change, and small retail shops come to be in a great measure supplanted by large associations with more of the merchant spirit in them, shopkeepers may probably benefit by the change quite as much as we, the customers, shall—they may benefit in spirit and yet not suffer in pocket. But unfortunately it is the badge of trade and not any pettiness of spirit to which it inclines, that many gentlewomen seeking to sell their work shrink from. In short, there is a great deal of false gentility current in the matter. At the end of eleven years' association with the employment of gentlewomen, I am able to note a great change for the better in respect to the esteem in which work is held. Eleven years ago workers wasted a vast deal of my time and their own in fidgety devices to conceal from all the world, even from me, the fact that they were working. I had numbers of workers on




my books professing to be but the medium between me and some needy friend, who when I made the rule, as for the purposes of proper training I soon found it necessary to do, that I should in all cases be in direct communication with the worker herself, had to disclose that the needy friend was but a figure of speech. A few, rather than submit to the rule, gave up the work.

At this day I can, as has been said, note a great change for the better. Applicants for work are no longer timid and hesitating, and discredited in their own esteem. On the contrary, they are now rather too apt to take one by storm, and to assume a mental attitude of flags flying and drums beating in honour of 'this very superior occasion.'

All this denotes simply an improvement in the public conscience to which the workers conform—those belonging to the best sets first. Ten years hence it may be one's good fortune to note other false gentilities as swept away by a further elevation in the public conscience, but meanwhile they add greatly to our difficulties.


I have said that I made reticence in promise my rule in spite of personal unpleasantnesses connected with it. My promise to my workers has never exceeded this—'Is it aid to subsistence you are looking for? Or if not aid to actual subsistence, is it the power to lessen the pressure of family expenses on parents or other members of your family? Or is it to make a charity purse? Any one of these objects I can be of use to you in. But if it be subsistence



you need, my work, except to a very small number amongst you, will not provide it suitably to your degree. Take the work if you will, but continue to look for some other employment.'

The word subsistence must include board, lodging, and sufficient apparel for the maintenance of health. The woman of the ordinary hand-working classes is, I can but think, in a prosperous condition, if she have a subsistence fund of from 14s. to 18s. a week. Clamour for higher wages than these for her will, it may be feared, be quite futile in face of foreign competition, and will only tend to make her malcontent. A far more beneficent course would be to give her a lesson in French thrift, and to provide her with practical proof that even 14s. a week holds possibilities both of saving and of recreation.

But when we come to the gentlewoman thrown totally on her own resources, it would be only pseudo-Radical cant to deny that what her sister of the ordinary hand-working classes might prosper on, she could only suffer on; even though she had the bravest, most healthy spirit conceivable. More especially under the head of lodging would her necessary expenses be heavier; and the point where she would first pinch herself would be the vital one of food. A gentlewoman thrown totally on her own resources is deplorably situated if her subsistence fund be under one pound a week. Therefore for applicants for work who state that they *must* make a living by it, I have but one reply, 'Take the work if you will, but do not think of it otherwise than as



of a wayside inn at which to rest till such time as you can make better provision for yourself.' This wayside inn it has been to not a few ; many of whom have been sincerely grateful for it.

A gentlewoman with only her own resources to turn to, should always seek employment where lodging is provided her in part payment for her labours, for the reason that lodging will rarely be reckoned against her at its full value to her, and as often as not will occasion her employer little, if any, additional outlay. But when aid to subsistence only is needed, this very fact may tell the other way. The lodging of a girl living with her parents or with other relatives as a rule, it may be said, causes no one additional outlay ; and it is therefore no object with her, but the very reverse, to obtain employment where lodging is given in part payment.

Again, a girl in this position often renders valuable household services that do not take up many hours of her day, but which, without her, would necessitate the engagement of a second and perhaps confidential servant. So that she can, without any money expenditure on her side, repay to those she lives with a large part of, if not all, the expense of her board. In this case the work she has from me may with great advantage to her provide her with the money for dress, doctor's bills, and small personal needs generally ; and may indeed give her in addition something to lay by.

Again, I have governesses for years going on and off my books accordingly as they are with or without

an engagement, or have or have not engagements for the whole of the day. Again, there are girls with invalid relatives for whose sake they are bound to remain at home. These cannot go out and make selection of work which might otherwise be very suitable, and perhaps highly remunerative. These are happy if they can find work which is brought to their very hands; work on which they have to expend no money, that they can take up at intervals, that brings them moderate pay, and leaves them what it rarely finds them, experts with the needle.

And here we are brought to a point of difference between my regulations and those of the work societies. Nearly all, if not all, the work societies have some such rule as that of the Gentlewomen's Self-Help Institute which runs as follows, 'Any lady wishing to become a working member must make application to the secretary, stating her circumstances and income, also furnish two letters of recommendation (one from a clergyman preferred) testifying to her being a lady by birth, of good reputation, and necessitous.'

The course I adopt is, to take on any lady who applies, provided I have work for her, and she gives promise of becoming a good worker and of a disposition to submit to the training necessary to make her such. From all the information I can gather, the practical result of this course is, that, as a body, my workers are as necessitous (neither more nor less so) as are the working members of the societies; whilst they have not had to make any humiliating

affirmations, nor to provide certificates that must often be models in the art of putting things. I have asked the manager of one of the Work Institutes for the society's definition of the word necessitous. She has answered, as I had anticipated, that it could not be made a pounds, shillings, and pence matter. I cannot find that she holds to any definition whatever.

There may be thirty people out of the four or five hundred on my books who are not in any usual sense of the word necessitous. That it is right and fit these thirty people who are not necessitous should have work if they wish for it, I shall show later on. What I wish to point out now is, that a far more effectual winnowing than can come of affirmations and certificates goes on amongst my workers, from the fact that I demand good work and strict discipline in return for the payments I make. So long as the work societies permit their working members full rein in selection of work to do, then to do it as ill or well as their unaided knowledge teaches them, to do it too at any such utterly irregular intervals as may suit them, so long will they have to form regulations against, and be overrun by, a crowd of applicants for membership whose main idea is that it would be 'great fun and rather useful' to make a little money by the work of one's own fingers, and who find in the uncertainty of a sale something of the excitement of a lottery.

But the young lady who, unprompted by pressing need, will sit for even two hours a day running tucks


and seaming seams to a pattern she may not throw aside for another any moment the fancy take her; who, more potent test still, has, if need be, to submit to be told at the end that her seaming is slovenly, and her tucks awry; who, most potent test of all, finds that though her two hours of presumed toil seem to break terribly into her day of amusement, her work, what with getting it out and packing it away again, examining yesterday's achievement and mapping out to-day's, makes no progress to speak of, and that in a month she has not earned what she was told she could earn in a week—the young lady who, with all her legitimate needs met from other sources, can yet do this, is so remarkable a character that for the sake of the race she ought to be encouraged.

A lady's selection of work for herself is made with a view generally to what is easy, always to what is interesting. Unfortunately my selection of work for her is made always with a view to what is not very easy, generally to what appears tedious. She brings out her perpetual sunflowers and poppies and apple-blossoms, her etched d'oyleys, her watercolours, her birthday cards—a whole array of pleasant idlenesses she is pleased to term work. She is unalterably convinced I could sell them if I chose; that there are the people to buy them if only they could be got at; and she harbours a suspicion that I have a tinge of malignity in my character that alone hinders me from taking them. If she be not necessitous, the negotiations will commonly fall through abruptly

when she sees certain work offered her for the very reason that wealthy women, finding it tedious to do for themselves, will therefore be the more easily induced to buy it when done by others.

Experience has marked out in my mind very clearly the degree of need my work is best suited to meet. It is the people whom sums varying from 8*l.* to 34*l.* a year would free from many embarrassing circumstances, whom I can help with most effect. There are thousands of gentlewomen left with narrow means, who cannot make income and the most economical expenditure balance by some such small sums as those I speak of; and in this way my work, supplying these small sums, can and does efface a vast amount of weak and anxious leaning on richer relatives or acquaintances, whose almsgiving, often insufficient, benefits the character of neither giver nor receiver.

Want of this sort is necessarily not so terrible as utter destitution; but it may entail severe suffering, and the sufferer, pinching first on the vital point of food, may approach starvation almost more nearly, because more secretly, than would the utterly destitute. Moreover, whilst utter destitution is decidedly rare amongst gentlewomen as a class, so rare that it should not be beyond the power of such agencies as the Working Ladies' Guild to meet, want of the kind I have described is painfully common, and scarcely excites the amount of commiseration it justifies. Want that 8*l.* a year (which 8*l.* is not forthcoming) would relieve, may seem to many



well-to-do people scarcely to deserve the name. But to many poor gentlewomen it means wear and tear of nerves injurious in the extreme, a starving of mind and body. To relieve want of this kind, and that not by almsgiving, but by the proffer of wages, does not sound magnificent; nevertheless it has appeared to me good practical work in the field of equalising welfare.

The conditions under which from 8*l.* to 20*l.* a year can be earned with me at plain sewing, or from 12*l.* to 35*l.* a year at silk embroidery, are quite compatible with a fair amount of social life and the supervision of a small household. The worker will probably be the better for having fewer idle moments, and I see no counterbalancing evil she will suffer. We have the testimony of Dr. Lauder Brunton to needlework as a 'healthy employment for ladies, inasmuch as it does not over-exert the brain or the body, but gives a gentle stimulus to both. It acts as a safety-valve for emotion, and for the daily worries of life, which none of us can escape, and which are so much more hurtful than work.' To its value to the intellect we have the testimony of one of the most intellectual of men and most subtle of observers. 'Methinks,' says Nathaniel Hawthorne, 'it is a token of healthy and gentle characteristics, when women of high thoughts love to sew.'

The conditions under which, in the case of plain sewing, 12*s.* a week (31*l.* a year) on stock work, and 15*s.* a week (39*l.* a year) on order



work can be earned, are onerous, because social pleasures and household cares must then play but a small part in the life. To earn these sums demands adroitness with the needle, and perhaps ten hours' work daily. There are many workers on my books who earn as much as this per week, but not as much per year, since they take 'some weeks' holiday in the course of the year. To such the work is not onerous.

In the case of silk embroideries, to earn 1*l.* a week and upwards, a worker would need to be especially skilful and also to give long hours a day to the work.

Unfortunately, if the needs of a poor gentlewoman absolutely demand that she should earn as a sempstress some such sum as 39*l.* a year, or as an embroideress 52*l.* a year, the mental stress she is under to get that sum weakens her power of work. In truth, in no class of society can work be said to be satisfactory unless the earnings overpass the legitimate needs in some measure, if only by three or four pounds a year. Therefore, if a gentlewoman's absolute needs approach too nearly to the sums named, she is on wrong ground if she decide to take my work wherewith to meet her needs—always provided she be equal to or can obtain other employment.

But there is another side to the whole matter quite as important as that of earnings—unless, indeed, it may be said to be this same question of earnings coming up in other guise, and as affecting, not poor gentlewomen only, but all wage-earning

needlewomen in the country. Those who have studied the social life of England will agree with me, I think, that there has been a time during this century, when the rule was that no woman should work who, from a money point of view, could afford not to do so. This time may be roughly said to lie between the close of the fourth decade of the century and the opening of the seventh. The close of that fourth decade had been signalised, it will be remembered, by the adoption of Free Trade in England. During the twenty years next ensuing, the country under the new regimen made immense advances in riches; not in sober, steady fashion, but, as has been said, by leaps and bounds. There was a great deal of money made, and it even seemed to behove those who had not made it to appear as though they had done so. The fact of money-making standing by itself has nothing very elevating about it, and if that fact had to find expression of itself, standing alone, the expression would reasonably take mean forms. And one form of expression it now took to itself was, that all the women of England above the hand-working classes as a body abjured work to the best of their ability. To work did then seem to imply that you had not money enough to pay others to work for you. And here was a feeling so admirably calculated to get hold of the smaller side of feminine nature that never was contagion more readily spread. All the old housewifery industries, so suitable and so dignified for the women of the upper and middle classes, were extinguished: the Berlin wool-work and conserves

era went out with ignominy and scoffing—for the new generation were flippant enough laughers—and the new era of idleness came in, idleness pure and simple.


Now that it had been decided that ‘not to work was honourable,’ the opportunity afforded by the advent of sewing machines was eagerly snatched at, and needlework threatened to become a lost art. As we find philologists recording with enthusiasm the existence of one aged dame, in the remoter districts of Cornwall, who had the Cornish Keltic still on her tongue—so we might have had antiquaries recording with equal enthusiasm the existence of one ancient dame who, buried in the wilds of some slow-moving, old-fashioned agricultural district, had all the old artful uses of the needle still at her command.

But before anything of this could be brought about a reaction set in. Powerful influences, coming in an unlooked-for direction, bore down the idle tendencies of the time before more than one generation had been corrupted. The High Church party began to preach everywhere, with great force of example, the creed ‘work is worship.’ The younger women of the upper and middle classes went over to the High Church party almost in a body—for women far more than men suffer from the vulgar love of masquerading it in the garb of beliefs into the heart of which they never enter. But work was so strong a passion with the devout of the party, that even its loosest outskirts felt the influence; society adopted the idea into its glib patois, and nowadays when a

lady is apologetic respecting the fact of her giving her time to work we feel she is somewhat old-fashioned or thinks us so.

This very fashionableness the real members of the party—and they are to be counted by hundreds of thousands, and their self-sacrificing difficult lives are their testimony—must often have deeply resented; but it has by no means proved an unmitigated evil. It has at least brought about this desirable result—that the poor gentlewoman has no longer to break through the code of her set when necessity bids her work. Her real difficulty now is, that the effect of the twenty years' reign of idleness remains with her. As she comes into my hand she is commonly incapable of doing any one thing in the world well. She is often an ignorant and slovenly housekeeper; she is a most inefficient needlewoman; she has an almost inveterate repugnance to rule; her reasoning powers are practically undeveloped. It is a thing to be noted by everyone when we come across a worker who, in the outset, as we say, *thinks* over her work.

But when a worker goes off my books, if she have worked for me any period over six months, it is an equally unusual thing if she have not been made a fair needlewoman. Let me have had her in training twelve months or two years, and it will be impossible not to see that she has become intellectually more orderly. She begins to help us by forming methods for herself. Then, having been all through those months quietly but steadily compelled into thorough-



ness in respect to one occupation of her life, it is unreasonable to suppose she will not have become more thorough in respect to others. I have indeed a theory that the gift of beautiful needlework can scarcely consort with a badly ordered household, and as we always say my workers are a very marrying set (I had the pleasure of seeing the names of three in one day's *Times*) an important social influence here sets in. These young wives being fine needlewomen, of methodic and observant habits, should do something towards improving their generation.

So I affirm that if, as is possible, there be thirty people on my books who are not necessitous in any usual sense of the word, it is yet right and fit that these thirty people should have work if they wish for it. Apart from the habit of thoroughness they will acquire, their influence as good needlewomen, and therefore (an almost certain consequence) lovers of good needlework, is wanted. The *personnelle* of my body of workers changes very frequently. They become richer, or maybe they become poorer: they marry or they take situations: sometimes, of course, they merely tire of their work, or resent the zealous criticism that alone has brought that work to a point where apologies are no longer needed for its shortcomings, but where, on the contrary, challenges to comparison can with safety be made.

All these causes combining, it is probable that since 1869 I have had not less than two thousand gentlewomen under training for periods of not less than six months; many of them for two or three years.

Not 5 per cent. of these two thousand gentlewomen would have submitted to this training had it not been the indispensable condition to their receiving work, and work having for its corollary wages. I have been told by a lady much interested, that at Watford, in spite of successful industrial exhibitions two years following, and in spite of the very moderate terms demanded, a class for technical instruction in needlework on the German system could not be formed, because a sufficient number of entries could not be obtained to render it remunerative. When a governess shall find it advantageous from the point of view of salary to announce, as she would her Hanoverian German, her Parisian French, her Cambridge diploma, that she is a certificated needlewoman of the London Institute or some other technical school, then such schools will have a flourishing life enough. Here without fear of contradiction we may say demand induces supply. If fine needlework is again to be the beautiful and precious product of the land it once was, the mass of the people must be interpenetrated with the true idea of it.

Dr. Falke, in his 'Art in the House,' explains that it is not so much to the artist or decorator as to the inhabitant of the house that he addresses his remarks; as it is from the mass of the people that any healthy and permanent revival of art must take its rise. It is said on this subject, 'Only when a consciousness of the appearance of things becomes sufficiently general to affect the majority, is it that the sense of the beautiful present in all minds is

quickened into action and stamps the productions of an age with the originality that presents to us, once more, art in a new style. It is indifference to the look of things amounting to unconsciousness, that is the prime cause of the chaotic state in which modern decorative art lies.'

Let us put 'needlework' in place of 'modern decorative art,' and the whole passage becomes as specifically as it is generally applicable. Seven years ago the English public in mass had not the first notion of what good needlework is. Applicants for work by hundreds have applied to me, many of them assuring me that their cleverness with the needle was proverbial, whose idea of good sewing, it is no exaggeration to say, was no more than the tacking two pieces of long cloth together with cotton strong enough to hold them as long as the material should last. It was literally 'indifference to the look of things amounting to unconsciousness.' For some two thousand I can vouch that all this has been changed. And as it is a change with a tendency to widen out laterally as well as vertically, these two thousand should do something towards leavening the mass, and bringing about the day when, once more, 'a consciousness of the appearance of things becomes sufficiently general to affect the majority,' and we are a nation of needlewomen again.

Then employers, having a craving for beautiful needlework about them, will by preference take governesses, schoolmistresses, servants, sempstresses, who have the ability for it; the impetus they have

hitherto lacked will be given to the life of the technical schools; these will become an economic need, and nothing but incapable management will hinder them from being self-supporting.

It has been stated that not five per cent. of these two thousand gentlewomen would have submitted to my training, had it not been an indispensable condition to their receiving work *and wages*; wages, too, it must be observed, that should commence immediately and not be in prospective and subject to a previous acquirement of skill, nor divide them from their present home life. And when I am met, as we all are frequently met, by the objection that the employment of gentlewomen in such industries as plain sewing, dressmaking, &c. interferes with the employment of the poor, it seems to me that there is more than one sufficient answer. The first answer that arises, because the easiest to support, is, that the true aim of beneficence being to equalise welfare rather than wealth, it has to be considered that our workers as a body are essentially as needy, have as many of their legitimate needs unprovided for, that is, as the ordinary dressmaker or sempstress.

Such of them of whom this cannot be said produce so little as to be incapable of affecting the labour market in any calculable degree by the amount of their production. The only mode in which they can affect the labour market in any calculable degree, and herein lies our second answer, is through the enlarged and cultivated interest excited in the manifold industries appertaining to the needle, bringing



these into increased request—a state of things which it would seem can hardly fail to have its influence for good on the wages of needlewomen.

It must indeed be distinctly noted here, that gentlewomen employing themselves on needlework for sale do not enter into competition with the ordinary sempstresses, their own countrywomen, but with the French and Swiss supplies. These last are the true competing, and therefore wage-governing, power at present on the market for needlework. The English needlewoman is paid the same wage as the French needlewoman, with a certain sum in addition for vicinity to the customer, ease and rapidity of communication, access without payment of duty to materials specially suitable to the English taste. What the French wage and this added sum amount to, is and must be the English wage. The advent of the gentlewoman on the market means, if she hold her ground, so much less foreign work imported.

It may here be remarked that, whilst there may be thirty members on my books who are not in any usual sense of the word necessitous, there are also some twenty probably who are not gentlewomen. I am not so careful to defend the presence of these; they have been taken on at odd intervals; some in ignorance of their status in society, others in full knowledge of this, and because the work promised to be of great value to them.

## CHAPTER VI.

WE now come to our second proposed reform, namely, 'That subscriptions be dealt with not as income, but as capital.'

Let us take the Gentlemen's Self-help Institute. In the year ending December 1874, this society received in public contributions 625*l.* 2*s.* 8*d.* I have not the report for 1875. In the year ending December, 1876, the society received in public contributions 836*l.* 1*s.* 11*d.* In 1877 these reached only 447*l.* 18*s.* In 1878 they were 522*l.* 5*s.* Thus in the four years out of the society's eleven years' existence of which I have particulars, it has swallowed up what might have been 2,431*l.* 7*s.* 7*d.* of capital. In the eleven years it cannot have disposed of less than 5,000*l.* The contention is, that had the society been bound to treat this 5,000*l.* as capital and not as income; had it been bound, that is, to produce this 5,000*l.* at the end of the eleven years intact, it would have been compelled into truer commercial courses; it would have invited custom on the only proper basis, good value for money received; it would have sought out for its workers the most saleable kinds of work, and not have left each one to make her own little experiment; it would have acquired such a

fund of experience as should now be not the least valuable of its possessions—and all this to the infinitely greater advantage of the pockets of the workers themselves, whilst removing the taint of pauperism from them. The most radical mistake the work societies have made is this treatment of subscriptions as income and not as capital. It is notable that those whose subscriptions are proportionately to the number of their members largest, are in results least effective.

The object of the societies was to find a market for the labour of their members, not to make pensioners of them. What did they want with an income of some hundreds? And what could they do without capital? In the first place it was, to appropriate Mr. Watherston's illustration, to travel on an unknown and insecure road, from which by one's own special request all the usual landmarks had been removed. The most successful commercial men will tell us they can distinctly recognise that their greatest advances in life have been preceded by periods in which they suffered the sharp spur of losses. It was then they tested in every part the machinery of their business; it was then they devised new and ingenious economies and planned new enterprises. Every one has seen at some time or other, when stopping at a railway station, an official passing down the train and testing the wheels of each carriage with his hammer. An analogous process is continually going on in all well-conducted businesses, and never more actively than at a time of losses.

But the societies do not recognise such unpleasant hints to do better as losses are. We do not find the word in their vocabulary—‘operations have been limited,’ ‘results fall short;’ regretful reference is made to the ‘great depression in trade,’ but not a word of great losses suffered by them in money. The only remedy it seems to occur to them to apply to a deficit, is a more urgent appeal to the liberality of the public.

‘We must bear in mind that the societies are by no means asked to act as ordinary traders. To recur to what has been said previously, if it be contended that they are deleterious as almsgiving associations, it may also be asserted that to advise them to take up the position of an ordinary house of business, is to advise them to an impossibility. But there is a third position that may be taken up, of which we have a great and successful example constantly before us. It is this position the writer had in her mind when she defined her own work as not that of a charitable association, nor yet that of a house of business, but as that of a special undertaking based on a sound economic principle, and having training and wages for its object.

The ground she thought out for herself was this, that there was no necessity to demand as a test of success, and as a condition of sound economics, that her work must be remunerative in the way a business to be called a success must be. Her undertaking need not be remunerative in that sense, but it must be self-supporting; the capital must be kept intact,

it ought to pay interest, and it should supply a risk fund.

It has been said we have the example of one such great and successful undertaking constantly before us. I refer to our Post-office. One law governing our Post-office is that in every branch it must pay its way. When the money orders under 10s. in value were found to cost more than the penny fee then charged on them, though the total loss was only a few thousands out of a yearly revenue of some millions, yet the principle governing the office was not departed from; the fee was raised to 2d. in spite of the threatened unpopularity of the change. Every branch of the Post-office has to be self-supporting. At the same time the Post-office must not make too much money. It has to make large contributions to the revenue, but these must not be too large. No sooner is there any great rise in its receipts than warnings are uttered both in the Press and in the House that to trade profitably is not the sole reason for its existence, and that the time has again come to make postal accommodation still cheaper and yet more efficient.


This is the kind of position we who have for the reason of our commercial existence the training and employment of poor gentlewomen, can with advantage take up.

There are special difficulties in the way of the employment of poor gentlewomen. If this were not the case, no special organisation for their assistance would be needed. And the writer does not at all

anticipate, as some do, that, as a class, they will develop any special talent, artistic or otherwise. In the first place, it is a pure mistake to suppose that refinement of thought and manners is specially congenial to the art faculty. The great artists of the world have been of the people far more than the great writers have. And it is important to remember that the gentlewomen of our day have no hereditary culture in art handiwork, and that there is strong reason to believe this hereditary culture to be pre-eminently valuable to the art craftsman or art craftswoman. There are whole districts in France, Belgium, and Switzerland, where it is the common possession of the ordinary hand-working classes.

Let us instance the Kensington School of Art Needlework—let the manager take on twenty young English gentlewomen: the probability is that she has not secured such good working material as though the conditions of the school allowed her to take on twenty young Frenchwomen of the hand-working classes.

In all likelihood fifty years hence, under the present energetic desire of the whole community to promote superior educational methods, this state of affairs will have become obsolete—but not for one class only; for all classes alike. Meanwhile it will not be gainsaid by any who have had experience in the matter—and they are those who are best qualified to speak—that the difficulties in the way of the employment of the uninstructed, undisciplined poor gentlewomen who bear down upon us in such masses,



are so great as to make a profitable trade in their work something so near akin to an impossibility as to be out of the discussion for many years to come. By profitable trade I mean such as the trader shall live by, and which shall also fulfil his reasonable hopes of growing richer as the years advance. I do not wish to infer that individual gentlewomen cannot and do not join the workshops of regular traders and become as much a source of profit to these as any of their ordinary workpeople. I, and doubtless the work societies also, have workers on our list who would be profitable to anyone who should employ them. But as the unskilled and undisciplined workers outnumber them by at least fifty to one, their influence for good on our balance-sheets can scarcely be perceptible.

It follows, then, that to advise the societies to take up the position of an ordinary house of business is to advise them to something very near akin to an impossibility; nevertheless it may be competent to assert that their capital should be kept intact; that they should accept no more annual subscriptions, as such; that if they do not actually form themselves into so many limited liability companies, yet subscriptions to them should be treated as regards a balance-sheet as though they were subscriptions for shares in a company, and not something to be consumed within the year; that interest should be paid on the capital; and that a sufficient reserve or risk fund should be gradually collected.

We must stay here a moment to give some

thought to the new position the working members of a society are brought into through the new policy entered on by their committee. With the subscriptions treated as though they were subscriptions for shares in a company, and not something to be consumed within the year; with interest paid on these capitalised subscriptions, the working members are no longer paupers. The first goal, in short, has been made.



## CHAPTER VII.

BUT it may be said, when most of the work societies cannot now, with the use of all their subscriptions, make two ends meet, it seems but a sorry jest to offer them what has preceded as their new programme.

The answer is that an entire change of policy is required. For the formula propounded by the committee at 42 Somerset Street, that 'the essence of a training school is to sacrifice itself to its workers,' let us substitute that, 'a training school started by subscriptions must be made self-supporting within a short time, or else closed as unsuccessful,' and financial mistakes will instantly assume in the minds of all in authority the importance they never fail ultimately to assert for themselves. Good finance will become a leading idea in the minds of all concerned. And it must never be forgotten that bad finance does not mean merely straitened funds. Bad finance has an inherent tendency to carry with it a slovenly state of affairs generally. If one's coal bill be 15*l.* a year when it should be no more than 10*l.*, it need not be that the rooms are kept at a greater heat in consequence; it is much more probable that the fires are only half cared for.

And not only the Somerset Street Institution with

its training school, but those work societies also who have wages for their sole object are bound to make good finance their leading idea. The ordinary trader has a sufficiently powerful incentive to it in his individual interest. On the other hand the extreme sketchiness of the aims of the work societies forms a direct incentive to waste. A sufficiently stringent programme is the richest gift that could be offered them; it would be of more money value to them than all their subscriptions have proved.

We will suppose our work societies with their year's subscriptions, as they come in, capitalised, with no surplus cash to fall back upon to cover a deficit; with the rigid rule laid down for them indeed that they are not to suffer a deficit. Economy will now have become the order of the day, and attention will early be called to the unproductive expenditure. Our third proposed reform, 'that there be a reduction of unproductive expenditure,' will come up for consideration in most natural sequence. The officials will of themselves develop a very useful passion for expenditure with returns, and a corresponding suspicion of expenditure that appears to bring nothing back into their society's purse. And it does certainly strike the writer that the outgoings without returns have been very excessive in the case of such of the work societies as give particulars to the public. They appear much overweighted in such items as rent, salaries, &c., when these are put in the form of a percentage on their sales.

But good finance is not only cautious ; it is also bold. Our fourth reform points to a course bolder by far than that at present adopted by the societies, but of a boldness which if it cannot be sustained will virtually decide the main question for each society, that question being, Is this society in any way equal to providing gentlewomen with remunerative employment? Our fourth reform then is, 'That sales on commission be abolished, that the societies take up orders entirely on their own responsibility, and that stock be made in some one or more branches.'

Of late poor gentlewomen have had a very deluge of advice as to saleable work and how to sell it. A book has even been written on this last point, in which the counsel is given that the gentlewoman in search of a sale for her work should have her name on as many of a new sort of exhibitions as she can, and that she should keep a book of all the articles she has out at the various places, and that whenever she effects a sale she should cross off the articles sold. This kind of proceeding cannot be compared to anything higher than the purchase of lottery tickets entered into with so much eagerness by the Italian peasantry, the interest in which forms a main part of the excitement of their life. Any information the poor gentlewoman has as to what articles to send to the various institutions is scarcely more to be relied on than is the Italian's forecast as to what will prove a lucky number in the lottery.

Then, in the matter of the advice as to saleable work yet more generally and lightly given. Versa-

tility is evidently in the minds of the advice-givers the quality *par excellence* of the successful wage-earner. One day a paragraph will appear suggesting that baskets tastefully fitted up must take with the public, and wonder is expressed that more of these are not found at the depôts of the various work societies. Another day sees the painting of china and terra-cotta buttons advanced as likely to be easy and remunerative. Then a holland cabin bag being suddenly needed for a sea voyager, and unsuccessful search being made at the work depôts, wonder is again expressed; it is suggested that such bags would be admirable things for members of work societies to produce.

Another counsellor has a belief only in large and ambitious pieces of work, such as window curtains, piano backs, knitted counterpanes, three-fold screens; she, however, tempers her advice by adding that the worker should in working make choice of such articles only as would be useful in her own household if she fail to dispose of them elsewhere. 'This,' she says, 'is one of the great principles in working which I forgot to mention before, namely, never to begin a piece of work which you will not be glad to keep to yourself if it fails to sell. It is a maxim I keep constantly in mind, and recommend to the careful consideration of each reader.' Here is advice about as practical as that of the French princess, who when she was told there was not bread enough for the poor people, suggested they should fall back on buns.

This counsellor, whose little work is as great a mixture of sound and unsound advice as an untidy girl's work-basket is of useful and useless odds and ends, carries her belief in versatility to the point of writing thus:—'The very first thing to aim at is the cultivation of the faculties of observation and foresight. When a new thing comes out, be it wood-carving, lace-making, crewel-work, or china-painting, learn it, teach yourself, or have one or two lessons, but do it at once; do not wait till it is a year old and then begin because every one else is doing it—like a sheep. If there is money to be made in it (beyond your 2s. a day) it must be made in that first year, while instruction is needed and patterns are scarce. But even in this you must use judgment. Hundreds of kinds of work are introduced which die a natural death in six months. You must have the talent to foretell whether it is likely to last long enough to make it worth your while to master it thoroughly; you must then have the power of observing when the passion for it is beginning to decline, and without a regret you must give it up at once and turn your attention to something else.'

We have here laudation of the very evil that has done more than anything else to bring the work of gentlewomen into bad repute. Think of it; wood-carving to be learned in one or two lessons, to be practised some six or twelve months, to be given up without a regret at the end of that time. I know a wood-carver in an old cathedral city, who will tell you that though he be seventy years of age, there

is never a year he has not discovered new subtleties in his art; and who would advise you that if after once entering on it, it were likely you could give it up without a regret, for Heaven's sake to keep out of it altogether.

It may be mentioned in this connection that the association lately formed to promote really artistic wood-carving demands of its students a three years' apprenticeship, following on a certain amount of preliminary study at some school of design.

This same writer from whom my quotation was taken, has herself said later on in her work, 'In olden times, beautiful pieces of work, which still give pleasure to all who look at them, were produced by women with far fewer advantages than we have at present. Modern women possess the same number of fingers, and ought to possess more intelligence than their great-grandmothers. Why, then, is there such a falling off in their productions? It surely is better and more satisfactory to work one good thing which will last, than to fritter away one's time in producing fifty indifferent ones, which in the course of a few years will have been lost or destroyed;' and also, 'I am quite aware that rubbish *does* sell sometimes, and I do not blame the girl who paints Easter cards at 1s. each, or the girl who makes 1l. a week by crochet antimacassars, for turning the bad taste of the public to their profit, but I say that there can be no permanent market for such goods, and that as taste improves the demand for them must decline.'

This, I say with pleasure, is sound doctrine, for which she cannot have too many readers. The pity of it is, that it is the unsound teaching, which she herself will, it is certain, quickly discard, that will most often be taken and the other left.

But, apart from poverty of execution, what comes under the present regulations of the work societies of all this advice-giving? Let us take the advice as to the baskets and the holland cabin-bags. It sounds plausible enough to the amateur, and it is no more than a chance whether scores of these articles be sent in to the dépôts during the next few months, or whether none be sent in. Knowledge will not govern the matter in any degree. A worker determining to devote her money and her labour to baskets and holland cabin-bags will not know whether she have fifty competitors against her or none.

It is just as though in some one of the great London shops, any one who had it in his or her mind that a certain article, say, sky-blue velvet, was required, were to order it in straightway—the possibility of twenty of the young people being seized with the same idea at the same moment being held of no account. Applied to a shop, the arrangement is at once convicted of absurdity: we do not give it a second hearing. Yet the inconvenience would be no greater in the case of the shop than it is in the case of the work societies; and if the absurdity do not strike us so forcibly in the latter instance, it is because the atmosphere of the charity bazaar, to their great detriment, still hangs round the societies, and

the general public think of them not as places where-at to purchase what one requires, but as places where one has to seek something one can purchase.

An even greater evil attending the present regulations is, that it is always the worker with her poverty, and her ignorance of the pulse of the buying public, who has to play the part of capitalist. If the work society at its own risk and expense order in half a dozen baskets of a member, to find them not saleable at a working profit, no one will be appreciably the poorer; the work society can afford to make a few experiments of the kind. But if the member make the baskets at her own risk and expense and find them unsaleable, she is very appreciably the poorer: she cannot afford to make even one experiment of the kind.

It is a fact, and one bearing strongly on the evil of sales on commission for poor gentlewomen, that not one applicant out of five hundred can I employ on the special kind of work she commences by offering me for sale; and this because I do not see my way to selling it. If the applicant be a member of a work society, it is only reasonable to suppose that what she brings to me as an inducement to me to give her work, is what she would deposit at her dépôt as her idea of what the public might best be induced to buy.

It may be said that the managers of the work societies should have power given them to control the choice of work. But this would be to place the managers in a most invidious and ungrateful position,



so long as the worker worked at her own risk and at her own expense. Experience shows that those ladies would sometimes have to submit to positive rudeness on the part of the workers for whom work had been selected, which work should have proved a bad investment.

I am thoroughly convinced that the only correct position for the work societies to take up is, that they should through their managers have absolute power of selection of the work to be offered for sale ; that they should themselves purchase the materials for the work, and give them out, not sell them to the workers ; that, on delivery of the made-up materials the worker should be paid for her work, either on the spot, or weekly, or monthly, as the rules of the society, governed by the interests of the larger number, should specify—that she should not, in fact, as now, wait contingently on the goods being sold, and even in some instances paid for, to receive the wages of her labour on them. It is proposed, in fine, that all risk should be removed from the weak shoulders of the individual worker to the broader shoulders of the society of which she is a member.

As a rule the societies should accept no more members than they can supply with regular work—exception might be made to this rule in favour of a few who should be held to be candidates for regular employment on vacancies arising ; meanwhile when, as would sometimes be the case, there was a temporary pressure of orders their services would be available.

The greater the need of the worker, the graver

the necessity that she should have regular employment ; and if this is to be secured to any considerable number of persons who are gentlewomen and not necessarily resident in town, order work will not suffice ; stock must be made in one or more branches. Choice must fall either on some general handicraft suitable to women, or on some one or more branches of needlework, in which the members of the society are to become specialists, and in which they are to seek after that kind of reputation which shall prove of more value to them than many hundreds of pounds of yearly subscriptions—the reputation, that is, of being amongst the most trustworthy, the most tasteful, the most advanced of the traders in the specialties on which their choice has fallen.

The amount and, within given limits, the character of the stock to be held by a society should be determined by its manager: she ought as to details to have absolute power in the matter. Blunders now and then should not be visited on her with severity : it may be looked upon as a certainty that she will make them. But if she blunder with the stock persistently and to a serious amount, then she must be judged incompetent. Naturally when the reputation of the society gets consolidated, the control of the stock work will become a much easier matter ; it will become increasingly easy to keep its amount close upon the amount of orders, and in keeping with the orders.

## CHAPTER VIII.

UP to this point it may not without reason be said that nothing has been suggested that has not carried with it some increase in the pecuniary responsibilities of the societies, without a sufficiently corresponding increase of their already insufficient income-earning powers. It may be urged that, income from subscriptions being cut off, any possible reduction in unproductive expenditure, and the change in policy in so far as it has as yet been sketched out, do not fill up the gap thus formed, much less do they promise any advance on past results.

But the change in policy has to be still further developed. The societies are not only to make as anxious a study of the requirements of their customers as regular traders would; they are also to meet their expenses in the way regular traders would—by profits, that is, on goods sold; and thus, in our passage to this state of things, we are brought to our sixth reform, ‘That customers’ own materials be not taken to be made up, but that all materials be provided by the society.’

It may be unhesitatingly affirmed, that unless an extravagant price be charged the customer for making up her own materials, this cannot be done except at a loss to the society doing it. Let us suppose

materials for a set of four infant's gowns sent in by a customer—the society is practically put to precisely the same expense in making up these as though it had supplied materials, and it is deprived of two-thirds of the legitimate profits out of which expenses should come.

The customer's idea of this transaction is, 'I have brought these four infant's gowns to be made up, and I think the society ought to be obliged to me for providing it with work for its workers. I do not put it to any expense in the matter. I simply ask the society to have the materials made up.' And probably the customer settles in her mind that half-a-crown or some such sum would be 'good pay for the worker'—this being, to her perception, the one charge on her four gowns.

But the society's experience will be otherwise; it will be as follows:—In the first instance the customer has to be received and her wishes mastered, and this not by a stupid or ignorant person, since those wishes are often very hazily indicated, and a mistake may mean to the sewer the having to do a great part of the work twice over. Nor are those wishes always very steadfast. Perhaps the next post after the customer's visit will bring a letter saying she is not quite sure about the gowns, she therefore prefers to have one sent as soon as made, and then she can better decide about the others. This means time and postage taken up in letters to both worker and customer, separate cutting out and packing of the one gown for the sewer,

separate carriage on it, separate entries of its receipt from the worker and of its going out to the customer, and then perhaps all sorts of alterations in the making of the other three, which alterations necessitate the going over the whole ground afresh with the worker.

The plain truth of this case would be, that a part of the cost of making up these four infant's gowns must come out of the subscriptions to the society, unless the manager charge so heavily on them as to earn the character for her institution of being one of the dearest places in town. By far the preferable course is, even at the risk of offending a few, to have one rule for all—namely, to refuse to make up materials procured elsewhere. If a society succeed in obtaining a reputation for the thoroughness and beauty of the work turned out by it, it can make its own rules, especially when these tend in the long run to save the pocket of the customer.

Of course it is understood that the societies are not to make their purchases of materials from the ordinary retail sources. They are to buy their materials wholesale, and the difference between the wholesale and retail prices is to go towards their expenses in lieu of subscriptions. This difference the customer has to pay in any case, let who will supply her with material, and it is for the societies a thoroughly legitimate source of income. Not to take it up indeed is to deal ill by the workers, to fight their battle badly—to fight it with, as it were, one hand tied to one's side. The workers individually

cannot buy materials at wholesale prices, therefore the course of action suggested to the societies would take from the worker nothing, unless it be the risk and inconvenience of her present outlays of money on materials which she may make up, but which it is very doubtful whether she will ever resell. This is a privilege she will hardly contend for.

Now the expediency of our fourth reform will become even more apparent than before. For the larger part of the farrago of goods now offered for sale at most of the work depôts it would be manifestly impossible to buy the materials at wholesale prices, as it would be difficult to find so much as half a dozen articles made up of the same material; whereas even in the very largest shops it does not answer the purpose of the shopkeeper to manufacture except in a few special departments, where he can do so on a sufficiently extensive scale. The greater part of the goods he trades in are not sold by him in large enough quantities of each kind to enable him to buy the materials for their manufacture as cheaply, or to adopt so many labour-saving contrivances, as can the manufacturer who is selling to hundreds of shops a few articles in each kind. This inability affects the shopkeeper not at all; as his great aim, to obtain as large and as satisfactory a trade as is possible, is not at all affected by it. But it does concern us greatly, as our aim is the remunerative employment of as many gentlewomen as is possible.

To take hundreds of persons, gentlewomen, scattered all over the country, unused to, often con-

temptuous of the most ordinary restrictions of business, and inclined indeed to resent them as an impertinence; to bring these gentlewomen into any order as workers, so that demand and supply are kept in any sort of correspondence, and so that a customer otherwise prepared to purchase can have assurance that she will get what she wants, is a sufficiently arduous task in any case, and by no means demands that we should make it unnecessarily arduous. Yet this is our task, and we not only render it unnecessarily arduous, we make it literally impossible, if we allow each worker to act on her own ideas as to what is saleable, and as to what constitutes good work and as to what price should be affixed to work, without reference to any ordered standard, or any thought of what her fellow-workers are engaged on, or without the use of the many labour-saving contrivances that can only be adopted where the scale of manufacture is large, or without the more advantageous purchases of materials that can be made when large quantities in each kind are absorbed. Therefore if our fifth reform is to have full effect, our fourth reform must have paved the way. There must be no divided responsibility as to what is manufactured; each society must take the entire responsibility on itself, and each society must concentrate its efforts on one or more branches. A careful choice may indeed dictate a certain amount of odd work which may even serve as a useful fringe to a society's special manufacture. But this is a totally different thing, and will have a totally different result, from

the irresponsible acceptance by the society of whatever work its members choose to send.

Let us stay here to see into what position as towards the buying public we have now brought our remodelled, reformed society. Let us instance a customer buying a trousseau. Hitherto she would not have given the society the order, though she may often out of benevolence have been a purchaser with it on a small scale. She would not have given the society the order for two reasons—one that it goes to a woman's heart to see a trousseau awkwardly treated and badly made, and she has had no sort of confidence in the capacity of the society's workers to make it well; the other, that having, say, a hundred pounds to spend, she has understood that if she spend it with the society, eighty-five to ninety pounds may be allowed to go to the trousseau, but at least ten to fifteen pounds will be claimed as a kind of philanthropy tax.

There is nothing inhuman in the customer's desire to escape payment of this philanthropy tax. She may well have thought it excessive, seeing how little of it ever gets into the pockets of the poor gentlewomen; she may have wished to make selection of her own charities, and she may not specially favour this one. If she be a rich woman, so rich that the world would say money with her could be of no consequence, she may yet feel, and justly, that money is of consequence with her, and ought at all times, and in whatever abundance, to be spent correctly. But people in general are not rich in any



such degree that this point could arise, and have naturally been suspicious of this margin of almsgiving that they have understood had to attend every purchase made with a work society, and they have even exaggerated its proportions and seen it where it did not exist.

But now with the reformed society the customer is no longer to be afraid to give an important order, for the society is brought into quite other relations to her and the buying public generally. It has openly discarded the office of almoner. It aspires now to be no other than a good merchant, feeling the pulse of the market to suit its wares to the demand. The first goal was made when it could say its working members were no longer paupers. Now that the buying public may see that they are not giving alms in making purchases with it, the second goal is made. The society will have many more customers, reposing much greater confidence in it, and in place of having to look about painfully for means to meet a deficit, will be presently taking into consideration how best to expend the dividends for the benefit of its working members.

## CHAPTER IX.

BUT there is one more obstacle to be removed before this can be. It is possible that a well-managed society, conforming to all the before-named conditions, might pay its way if it could dispense with all training of its members.

But it is not plain how this could be dispensed with, even if a society have not among its objects the improvement of needlework or some other hand industry. The society has to devote itself specially to certain branches of work ; it has to acquire for itself a good reputation in these, and it has voluntarily attracted to itself a body of unskilled workers only, unenergetic by habit, with no good working characteristic specially attaching to them as a class, not specially sturdy, nor subtle, nor thorough, nor artistic. Difficult, impracticable, piteous kind of people, not a few of them, to deal with.

Everything considered, a society employing gentlewomen, having a reputation to gain for good work, must be at great expense in training its workers—none the less so that nine-tenths of those workers will assert that they are quite competent to the work without any training whatever.

And a society, too, must be prepared to surrender

no small proportion of its trained workers at the moment of their becoming most capable. We are told in the account given us of the diamond-cutting industry introduced by M. Charles Roulina into Paris, in which industry he employs some hundreds of women, that the only way to teach diamond-cutting is to give the apprentices diamonds to spoil in the attempt at cutting them, and that this being a costly matter, those who show no fitness for the work are shortly discharged, the remainder going on in due time to become 'full lapidaries,' and engaging in return for the training they have received to work for M. Roulina a given number of years.

Spoiling underlinen or embroidery is not so costly an occupation as spoiling diamonds ; but if hundreds are engaged on it, it tells against one in a considerable sum ; and we cannot recoup ourselves as M. Roulina can, by securing our workers for a given number of years. Indeed, we must take a directly opposite course ; we must always be striving to push off the more needy to something better. A kind of engagement is made with my workers that if they take work they are to try it for a not less period than six months. This is done to keep off the hundreds of fanciful, idle women who present themselves as applicants for work, and who after trifling with the time of my assistants, as if it were as valueless as their own, would decide that the whole thing was tedious, and that they could not see why such and such a rule could not be dispensed with, and in short they did not think they would go on with the thing.

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But if a worker be found desirous of giving up work for any better reason than temper or indolence, she is at once released from her engagement. For reasons given elsewhere, the *personnelle* of our body of workers is continually changing; my experience in the matter is that of the societies also. Our great use indeed is to be channels for occasional labour; and if we take care to fashion it into good hall-marked metal during the often short time it is in our hands, we shall have fulfilled a second great use. But we shall not find it remunerative in the sense of a business. It has not yet been *proved* that it can be done on self-supporting principles even. In short, when I come to the point of training, could I not look on some of the money I have expended in bringing out good work as an investment in public confidence, I might have had up to the present to resort for my defence from the charge of pauperising to the fact that the economists grant that it is possibly allowable to 'fill up the deficiency of public or general opinion' in matters of education.

If I deducted from my workers' wages the expense of training them, few of them would work for the smaller sum left. They mostly come to me prepared to scoff at the idea of their needing any training; at the same time few give up the work without a word of acknowledgment of the benefits they have derived from the instruction given them.

But though the expense of training the workers cannot be deducted from their wages, it should come out of their work. Last year, in the eleventh year,

that is, of the life of my undertaking, the work of the gentlewomen employed by me paid its own way entirely, with the exception of providing no salary for management, out of the profits on its sale, and that of the materials into which it was put. It even gave nearly five per cent. interest on capital, but it provided no risk fund. This was its best year in spite of the depression of trade. So that to have indisputably the character of an entirely prosperous and self-supporting undertaking, it lacked only the salary of management and the year's contribution to a risk fund. I have good grounds for hoping that the next few years may see even these two points provided for. If the undertaking has continued to advance each year through all the depression in trade, it is because more people have with each year found it their interest to purchase the work, whilst the cost of making it known has diminished. And as the advance made last year was proportionately greater than in any previous year, I do not think I am too sanguine in what I expect the years to come to do, or in treating the apparent deficit as invested, not lost capital.

So long as I act as my own manager, it is not my intention to put aside any wages of management. What would ordinarily be wages of management will, when it comes to exist, go to general profits, and will in each year be divided with the workers; but if it be but brought into existence I have achieved my purpose, and established the success of my experiment.

For reasons that will explain themselves more fully as we go on, the proposed division of profits with my workers will be a gift to them from me in the form of a kind of prize money. It will not enter into my contract with them ; the division will not be obligatory on me.

What I have to advance now is, that if I am able to say in three or four years' time that it is *proved* that the training and employment of gentlewomen in needlework or other hand industries can be carried out on self-supporting principles, it is because I have myself practised that method which I have set down as the sixth reform necessary to the well-doing of the societies ; necessary to them if they are to do full justice to their working members. And this method is, ' That a selection be made within strict limits of other goods than the work of gentlewomen in which to traffic.'

Unless a society be on a very extensive scale (and, be it said, the best history a society can have, the best certificate of its thoroughness, is, that it has grown up from small beginnings), rent of show-rooms in a good locality, salaries large enough to engage capable people in the work, weigh heavily on its resources ; and though a society may have reached a stage in its life to require these for its better development, it may yet be unequal alone to supporting them.

This difficulty presenting itself to me, I fell on the expedient of dividing the expenses of rent, office furniture, salaries, &c., between the work of the

gentlewomen and a small selection of goods other than their work, the latter being chosen with a view to the convenience of the customers of the former.

If the work societies were to adopt this plan, they would no doubt carry it, as I have done, no further than should relieve them of anxiety as to expenses. They would keep a separate account for these outside goods, as I will call them, and after debiting them with a duly calculated share of the general expenses, they could pass such profit as there was to the capital account, where it would go towards enlarging the societies' capacity for usefulness; or they could give it in the form of free studentships in technical schools to deserving and promising workers; or they could adopt my own plan of dividing it with the workers as a kind of bonus, to encourage these to do their utmost to improve their handiwork, and thus to come upon the most certain means of bringing them constant employment and higher remuneration.

Now we shall see why this bonus obtained from the profits on sales, some of them having no reference to the members' work, must not go to these as coming to them by contract as part of their wages. It must come to them not as wage-earners but as students, and in the form of prize money for industry and good work. It must go strictly by results. I do not propose to make it even a uniform percentage on earnings. Workers will be divided into classes in accordance with the degree of their response to our efforts to teach them.

Such as have sent in their quota of work monthly throughout the year, and have in each instance conscientiously sought to follow instructions, will have their names standing for a full share in the division of profits. Such as have made three lapses in the course of the twelve months, will have their names standing for a three-quarter share only. Such as have made six lapses will have their names standing for a half share only. Below this workers will be excluded from any share in the division; but the loss of the bad will be the gain of the good workers, as it will go to increase the shares of the latter. It is probable I may in the division apply a part of the profits to actual prize money to be given after a direct contest. The only difficulty in the way of this is, that of bringing so large and varied a set of workers under anything like equal conditions.

I had at one time under consideration the turning my undertaking into a purely co-operative society. What mainly deterred me was the doubt lest my co-operators might not possibly contend with me on a point where I did not choose to risk defeat. A certain number might say, 'There are some 400 of us—why add to our number? A new-comer means the expense of training her. If the 400 of us cannot supply all the work we have the demand for, let us make up the deficiency by purchasing goods in France or Ireland, and let us put more of the capital into outside articles which bring us in a satisfactory profit.' The members, having obtained for themselves a place in the association,



would, some of them, probably desire to advance the trading rather than the training and wage-paying branch. There would be no objection to this, except that it would run counter to plans which embrace the training in good work and methodical habits of the greatest number of poor gentlewomen consistent with a certain expenditure, and payment to them of remunerative wages for their work. The branches in which it has been found possible to employ amateurs at all have hitherto been kept entirely to them. As more demand arises in any such branch, more workers are taken on and trained.

If only to keep the societies off the ground of hazardous speculation, their traffic in other goods than the works of gentlewomen should be kept within strict limits. If it should play its part of dividing rent and other expenses, it would do enough. Sale of the materials in use by a society in its special branches of manufacture would, it is obvious, be doubly advantageous to it, as, besides contributing towards expenses, enabling it to make its purchases on a large scale and therefore more profitably. Choice would therefore naturally fall in the first instance on these, carrying, as they would, very little risk. In any further selection the ability of the manager would, of course, be much more severely tried.

In short, we cannot have gone through our six proposed reforms without gaining the idea that our manager, whose status the seventh and last proposed reform concerns, must be a very capable person indeed. And a very capable person being found, she

must have undivided authority over the conduct of the main part of the society's business. The proposal is, 'that a manager be appointed who, subject to all due financial checks, should within certain well-defined limits have undivided authority.'

All things considered, my choice would fall on an amateur if she had proved administrative abilities, receptivity, and a cultivated taste, rather than on a person educated in business. A person educated in business commonly goes in one groove only, though she go in that groove well. So much in the management of a society for the employment of gentlewomen is so entirely outside the ordinary routine of business, that she would probably have quite as much both to learn and unlearn as would an amateur; and the latter might even have the advantage in coming to her task with her mind more free. Of all those whom I have taken to assist me in my work, not one but has come to me as an amateur. From the outset the sum-total of the business knowledge contributed by any one has simply been that which an English gentlewoman applies to the ordinary affairs of her household.

For the management of a society assuming to give even three hundred poor ladies as much work as they could take, a very able woman would be needed. I do not think she would be properly remunerated under from 200*l.* to 300*l.* a year. The position being thus one of considerable emolument, there would doubtless be numerous competitors, and choice might fall on one not unanimously, but by a majority only.

The board of directors or committee being, however, composed of English ladies and gentlemen, the manager once elected, might, it is to be believed, rely on the loyal support of all its members, even of those whose choice she was not. And loyal support she will need—for it will be with her to originate much of the policy of the society. That she will come to an unwise decision sometimes there can be no doubt; but better this than that her authority should be only partial over certain determined ground.

In my opinion she ought to have in her hands both the appointment and the dismissal of all subordinates. In one direction only would I restrict her, and there the restrictions should be most rigorous—every farthing of expenditure should be accounted for, and the best known checks, not less on the manager than on her subordinates, should be in use. Upon a late unhappy commercial failure one of the directors alleged as a palliative of his conduct, that he would have deemed it a personal reflection on the manager of the most insulting character, to have asked the questions that would, he admitted, have revealed to him the whole rotten state of affairs.

This idea of even the most searching examination into the accounts carrying with it personal reflection on the management must never be so much as admitted. The matter must be kept quite outside the region of personality, and if the rule be never departed from, the manager will accept it without a thought of difficulty, nay, even with pleasure, as lessening the debatable ground it will be her duty to occupy.

## CHAPTER X.

It is said the manager will find her duty taking her on debatable ground. We cannot have gone over our seven proposed reforms without having come to feel that we have chosen for discussion a subject bristling with prejudices. If the writer may speak of herself in the matter, it has been to her both a pain and an anxiety that she has had to say so many things that must be displeasing to so many persons. But had they not been said, had she prophesied smooth things only, she would have been like a physician who gives only palatable advice.

Amongst other objections it will be urged against the methods proposed, that they do away with all spontaneity and put in its place a cold-blooded calculation. But so-called spontaneous benevolence is too often no more than an attempt, made out of indolence, to take short cuts towards doing good, with the imperfect and often pernicious results to be expected. As the use of calculated, carefully weighed methods does not necessarily destroy spontaneity in art, so neither does it in benevolence. Calculated, organised benevolence indeed will, far more frequently than uninstructed, ill-considered benevolence, be ornamented with pleasant device and gracious giving. It is a distinct part of the work

of societies like the Charity Organisation Society, the Kyrle Society, the Working Ladies' Guild, to cultivate personal relations between helper and helped—in a degree far beyond what was the case with the careless giving of old days.

Again, the writer feels that many of her workers may think she does them scant justice in the estimate of their powers given from time to time in these pages. With such she would put herself right in a few words.

If of very few of them it can be said they came to her excelling as workwomen, of the large majority of those who have worked under her for more or less extended periods she can say they have so accepted her somewhat strict training as to demand her unfeigned respect for them as women. She receives many confidences from time to time, besides which she gains no little insight into their characters and that which concerns them, though they do not tell it in so many words, and she knows what large numbers of them are doing work and submitting to rules that were at first repugnant to their tastes and foreign to their habits, out of a noble and an upright pride which forbids them to leave the whole burden of their subsistence upon shoulders willing enough, but already too heavily weighted; or, as in other cases, forbids them to do their personal charities at the expense of others.

She testifies with pleasure to the amiable anxiety displayed by the greater number of them to co-operate with her in her determination to have none but good, sound work, when once they perceive

the difficulties of her undertaking, and what each one can do to help all other poor gentlewomen in helping to restore the public belief in their general capacity for work; for only those who have had occasion to gauge the public incredulity as to anything good or reasonably cheap coming from the hands of a poor gentlewoman, will know the harm that has to be undone and the good that can be wrought in this direction.

Yet another word on a subject on which it may be thought enough has been said, but which to the writer's mind cannot be brought too often or too strongly before all concerned.


Sales on commission as a means of meeting the needs of poor gentlewomen are to her thinking quite beside the mark, incompetent in the very nature of them to meet those needs. Yet numerous dépôts, under the somewhat misleading name of exhibitions, are being started in London and elsewhere, avowedly to stereotype this worst feature of the work societies, and with a temporary *éclat* which, before it evaporate, will entice hundreds of poor gentlewomen to lay out money they will never see again.

Such exhibitions for sales on commission can only be the toys of rich women and the white elephants of poor ones—a lottery to both alike. The first assumption acted on by the promoters of such exhibitions is, that to trade successfully is open to any one to do at first hand and immediately, if only one chose to try. To the ordinary mind, observing that the classes who enter trade as the road to a

livelihood find it expedient to give some years and often a considerable sum of money to the gaining an insight into the methods common to successful trading, it might seem that a number of gentlewomen, taken at haphazard, would not be so far more richly endowed with the trading faculty than are the trading classes themselves that they could dispense with the training these latter find so indispensable.

But observation of this sort is not the strong point of the class, or rather the two classes, who will for a time keep alive these exhibitions even as at present constituted. Those two classes are—first, the cheery, well-to-do dilettanti, who find a new and pleasantly seasoned excitement in this game of prizes and blanks, without accurate thought to the price paid; secondly, the really needy gentlewomen, to whom every sixpence spent on materials and fees is of moment, who hearing of the sales that are made, and not hearing a word of the small percentage these bear to the amount of stock sent in, conclude, each one, that it is her luck and not her wit that is at fault, and that her turn must come if only she try long enough; and so goes on backing her number when the money she is expending is in simple truth the bread out of her mouth. All the longer will she do this if she happen often enough on the windfall of a sale, not to remunerate her, but to keep her faith alive.

Though seen by neither promoters nor subscribers, it is almost inevitable in the order of things that such exhibitions should not succeed as media for sale. It will not be difficult to prove this. Let us



suppose an exhibition has four hundred subscribers, each with the liberty to send four articles. We have here a heterogeneous collection of sixteen hundred articles, supplied by four hundred persons, each one contributing her share without any reference to the contributions of her three hundred and ninety-nine fellows. Let us also suppose a tradesman to furnish his shop with sixteen hundred articles in considerable variety. But each series will be carefully chosen with reference to the remaining series, the tastes and purses of the class of customers he proposes to cater for will be gauged with trained skill;<sup>1</sup> in short, selection rather than collection will be the governing principle of his purchases. It is true selection will in a measure rule the supplies to the exhibition, but that measure will be insignificant in the extreme. Each one of the four hundred subscribers will make selection of her four articles, but this is only to say the selecting principle will be three hundred and ninety-nine times feebler in the case of the exhibition than in the case of the shop. A certain result will be that scores of articles will be sent to the exhibition that no one in the world cares to buy; that of some things there will be an excess, of others not enough; that, in fine, there will be none of that continuity in which a shop finds its greatest success, the desire after which indeed originated the shop of modern times in place of the fairs and travelling merchants of the Middle Ages.

<sup>1</sup> The world was lately given, as a rough axiom current in trade, that 'any fool can sell, but it takes a man of business to buy.'



It has elsewhere been noted that manufacturers on such a small scale as each one of these 400 exhibitors must be, cannot as a rule buy their materials wholesale. Themselves making their purchases badly, and having neither the skill nor the opportunity to test the wants and tastes of the buying public, what chance have these of obtaining remunerative sales? The chance, I am told, arising out of the vast amount of cleverness and originality latent in the minds of English gentlewomen. I demur to the originality as, at least in any working form, one of the rarest of possessions; and untrained cleverness is by no means the most trustworthy of workaday qualities.


The truth of the matter in respect to all these exhibitions for sales on commission, especially where the members pay entrance fees, is this—a few of the richer members who visit much or travel much, being in the way of seeing novelties, will, if they are clever at copying or adapting, reproduce or imitate these, and occasionally some one of the imitations will make a hit, and for a brief period bring in the copyist sufficiently remunerative prices. It is opportunely seized novelty, and not beauty of design or exquisiteness of workmanship, that will have the day, for the reason that they who love these latter best will hardly be brought to look for them here, amongst the contributions of amateurs, any more than one would look for diamonds in the streets. There may be diamonds in the streets, but it is not where one goes to look for them.

As for opportunely seized novelty, one might as:

well tell the poor gentlewoman to conjure herself into a leader of fashion as tell her to produce only articles that are fresh and new in idea to the mind of the possible buyer. When a gentlewoman becomes reduced in circumstances, in no way does the galling yoke of poverty make itself more quickly felt to her than in her discovery that, in respect to the more ephemeral ideas that lie on the surface of life, she can no longer keep pace with her set. This is why mere acquaintanceship so rarely survives the fall in worldly position of one of any two concerned. How then ask her to be in advance of all the world?

I venture to say that if the working members subscribing to an exhibition of articles for sale on commission be some 400 in number, such sales as will be made will mostly centre round the names of some twenty of the well-to-do members; some thirty more may sell enough to cover outlay; the fees of the 350 remaining, who will have sold only an odd article now and then, will really go towards paying the selling expenses of the fifty whose goods moved off somewhat better.


There is in any case an easy method of testing the truth of this. Let the working members of any institution for the sale of articles on commission—whether it be a work society, or a *depôt* in the hands of a public company, or a *depôt* in the hands of one individual—insist on being supplied with two sets of figures, to be drawn up and printed for distribution among them once in each year, to be also put into the hands of any new applicant for membership. These are: First, the number of the working members,



together with their names and addresses. Now that rich women of acknowledged position set the example of selling their handiwork, the publication of name and address should meet with little objection. In any case the prejudices of the few ought here to yield to the interests of the many. Secondly, let the stock supplied by a working member in the course of the year, whether sold, withdrawn, or remaining at the *dépôt*, be entered at its priced value against her name, together with the amount she has received in money from the sales.

With these two sets of figures in their hands, working members and also applicants for working membership would at least know what the chances were against them in these lotteries. 'Experience is a plant that to be of any value a man must buy it for himself in the market.' This notwithstanding, 'is it,' as has been said in other reference, 'is it absolutely necessary, is it a law of nature,' that entire silence as to their chances should be kept towards the ignorant (so far as knowledge of the world and of business goes) and credulous who make up the mass of poor gentlewomen seeking employment?


Only let the chances be made known, and these exhibitions have a perfect right to an existence if they can obtain it. Indeed, they might do a very pleasant, and even a very useful work, if they advanced more that part of their programme belonging to an exhibition proper, and gave only a minor place in it to such sales as might be arranged through their agency. If rich women can be brought to compete eagerly in the matters of work-



manship and design, they will come to have such a close interest in the hand industries they happen to practise as can in no other way be gained. They will desire to see the practical effect of many more ideas than they can themselves work out. They will, as a consequence, give employment to greater numbers of their poorer sisters, providing these with an economical inducement to attaining greater technical skill. Thus it might even come about that these exhibitions were the very places we should go to for exquisite workmanship and for beauty of design.

There is little doubt that the poorer a gentlewoman is, the more she requires to be under tutelage as to the work she does; and it is somewhat hard, and not a little absurd, to be told in this connection that one is waging war against all originality and all speculation. For originality, there are certain processes in agriculture which to the uninitiated look like wanton destruction of the young and thriving plant, but which are in reality highly beneficial to their somewhat rank growth. And originality suffers no diminution from a certain amount of seasonable restraint, but the rather grows up stronger and truer for it, with less of affectation and excrescence.

For speculation—does any one think what the word really means, and also what is the modern growth of meaning upon it? It meant once upon a time to watch, to observe, to weigh facts beyond one's fellows, having its derivation from the Latin *specula*, a watch-tower. To-day it has come to mean the throwing of a die when the chances of the game are uncertain; the less there is known about



those chances the more speculative we call the act. The writer affirms herself from first to last on the side of real originality and true speculation.

And now that these chapters draw to a close, what may be said to be the sum of them? This, that philanthropy cannot be taken up as a pastime; that rich women must not expect to have their societies as their husbands and brothers have their shooting-box and their yacht, fitting adjuncts to their rank and position, with no special responsibility attaching to them. It will be noted that not once has the writer been able to advise the promoters of the work societies to escape from their perplexities and embarrassments by taking easier paths. On the contrary, they have boldly to advance in more difficult ones, 'out of the nettle Danger to snatch the flower Safety.'

In this garden of beneficence there are at all times weeds springing up with the flowers of kindness, and grateful sisterly aid, and new hope, we would fain grow. There will be pain and disappointment and, above all, work before us. If we can attain a serene temper it will advantage us much. Patience and an untiring spirit will be a necessary to us as warmth of heart. It has been said with scorn of some men that they wanted to fill their lives with vacation pursuits and still be 'poets in a parenthesis.' And we have to make sure that we do not want to fill our lives with vacation pursuits and still be 'philanthropists in a parenthesis.'





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